

A Soldier of France  
✠ To His Mother ✠



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A SOLDIER OF FRANCE TO HIS MOTHER

Across the face of mother earth the great scars run —  
The graves of soldiers, trenches, broken fields — all  
scars;  
While God, the sad old moon, and all the myriad  
stars  
Look on, and watch her strive to heal what man has  
done.

RICHARD J. BROYLES.

Demerzier, Eugene Emmanuel

# A SOLDIER OF FRANCE TO HIS MOTHER

*Letters from the  
Trenches on the Western Front*

TRANSLATED, WITH AN INTRODUCTION

BY

THEODORE STANTON, M.A.



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To

THE YOUNG MEN OF AMERICA,

*who may be called to the  
colors, I dedicate this transla-  
tion. May they take as their  
model this young French  
sergeant who died bravely  
fighting for his country  
against our common foe.*

T. S.



## PREFACE

THE following letters were written by a young French painter who was at the front until the beginning of April, 1915, when he "disappeared" in one of the combats in the Argonne region of France. "Should he be spoken of in the present or in the past?" asks M. André Chevrillon,<sup>1</sup> a friend of the soldier's family, in the preface to the French edition of this book. "Since the day when his mother and grandmother received from him his last communication, a post card bespattered with mud which announced the attack in which he fell, what a tragic silence for these two women who, during eight months, had lived only with these

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<sup>1</sup> M. Chevrillon, the nephew of Taine, is a writer of repute in France and the author of a half-dozen able volumes, several of them being on English subjects — "Sydney Smith," "Etudes Anglaises," "La Pensée de Ruskin," and his very recent volume, "L'Angleterre et la Guerre." He became interested in these letters while they were arriving in Paris from day to day and complimented their author on their literary quality, as is revealed in the letter of March 17, where M. Chevrillon is referred to. Much of the matter used in this preface is a paraphrase of M. Chevrillon's preface attached to the original edition of this book, "Lettres d'un Soldat," and which was of course intended for the French public and so less interesting, in parts, to our American public.

letters, which came almost daily. In his studio, among the pictures in which this young man had fixed his dreams and his visions of an artist, I have seen, piously arranged on a table, all the little square white sheets of this correspondence. What a speechless presence! I did not know then what a soul was there transcribed in these messages to the family hearth—a fully formed soul, which, if it had lived, I feel sure would have spread its fame and its influence far beyond this little home circle and radiated a-wide among the hearts of men.”

The French publisher of the original edition further informs me that one of the reasons why the author's name is not given is because there still rests a faint hope that he may be a prisoner in Germany; and M. Chevrillon writes me in a recent letter: “I am sorry that I am not at liberty to give his name, but his mother still hopes that he may not have been killed, and allowing his name to be printed would be to her like surrendering that hope.” I fear, however, that there is little probability of this hope being realized, for experience has shown that in this war the word “disappeared” after a soldier's name is little more than a euphonious term for “dead in an unknown grave.”

“He has the soul of the supreme artist,” continues M. Chevrillon in his preface, “and that of a poet also, along with the timidity of the young man who, at sixteen, left school for the studio, and who learned all by himself to express in language, which the reader will appreciate, whatever moved him. Tenderness of heart, a fervent adoration of nature, a mystic comprehension of its changing moods and its eternal language—all these things which the Germans, the pretended inheritors of Goethe and Beethoven, imagine they have the monopoly of, we find here in these moving lines written by a young Frenchman for himself and the loved ones at home.”

M. Chevrillon thinks that perhaps the most touching feature of these letters is their spirituality, “so grave and so religious,” which is, he observes, noticeable in so many letters from soldiers at the front. During these long winter months passed in the mud and ice of the trenches, with death ever near at hand, “these young men seem to regard eternal things with more profound and sensitive eyes, as if each one, in the fulness of his strength and youth, thought to see them for the last time.” But, in the midst of these terrible experiences, this

young Frenchman reveals "all the stoicism of a Marcus Aurelius, . . . . and, going far back beyond stoicism, we find in his language all the ancient and sublime thoughts of India. . . . . Indeed, the soul which manifests itself in these letters presents, like that of Michelet, Amiel, Tolstoy, and Shelley, profound analogies with the tender and mystic genius of the Râmâyana." He is in fact a religious poet "who sees in the world the essence of all the ineffable moods"; a musician also who, though in the trenches, lives with Beethoven, Handel, Schumann, and Berlioz, "whose rhythms and ideas are a part of him."

Love is one of the words which return the most often in this correspondence—"love of the fields and the plains, of the trees and the stars, of the little animals of the meadows, in a word, of all things, animate and inanimate, of sky and earth"; love, too, of the living and the dead, whether friend or foe.

M. Chevrillon calls attention to the interesting fact that, though these letters are thrown off very hastily day by day from trench or camp, they form, nevertheless, a progressive whole like the stanzas of a poem or the acts of a play. The history of a life is here developed in a few

months, a tragedy almost observing the three unities. One may follow its spiritual progress step by step directed by an ever-present powerful will. "It is rare to find a more moving picture of the interior of a soul." Here is an artist and a poet who looks at life and unfolds himself in the very opposite way from a man of action, and yet is forced by circumstances beyond his control to become a man of action *par excellence*. Here we see one of the evil sides of universal military service. "His whole system of culture and special discipline had had the effect of still further refining a sensibility already very keen by nature. Because of this same nature and by habit, he ever seeks solitude and contemplation. The law of his existence had been instinctively to stand outside of the mass and preserve an individuality of his own." But when the war comes and he goes to the front, he suddenly finds himself living in direct opposition to this law of his very being. Nevertheless, he throws himself apparently without regret, except at rare intervals, into the thickest of the fight, lives day and night shoulder to shoulder with the *poilus*, and readily bends himself to the mechanical demands of war. Before the cloud burst, he would have regarded such a



course as little less than slavery; "and the only way out of it seemed to be death," which in the end came indeed. Little by little he accustomed himself to look upon his interior life, where lived his visions and hopes of an artist, where was always a chord responsive to the rhythms and throbs of the universal existence, "as only dreams, and dreams which finally vanished never to return."

This is what he calls "adapting himself." This phrase appears very often in these letters. To him it means duty, and the difficulty attached to the performance of this duty is measured by the difference between his present and his past life, between the natural tendency of his character and the effort which he must make to perform the duty demanded by the hour; and this difficulty was greatly increased by the fact that "to adapt oneself" was not thoroughly to transform oneself by yielding completely to the influences around him, but to absorb there only so much as is necessary for his temporary nourishment while he persists in his old tendency; to give up everything and yet keep the essential. In order to accomplish this, he has simply to remain sensitive, midst the menaces and the agitations of the war, to all things beautiful;



for in the eyes of "this religious poet" beauty is the divine spirit which reveals itself more or less clearly in nature. Hence the strength which he receives in contemplating nature and which lifts him little by little above the accidental circumstances of the individual; and in order to derive therefrom all the possible benefit and remove all disquietude from his mind, he must say farewell to the past and the future, and live only in the present moment.

"This emancipation of the soul is not accomplished in a day. The first of these letters are very beautiful, but what they teach is what almost all the letters of our soldiers tell us. . . . Yet even at the start, we see him trying to keep control of his own individuality against the influence and excitement of the outside world; and he succeeds in this, guarding himself and isolating himself." Though he moves among his fellow soldiers, he is happy to find that, from an intellectual point of view, he remains intact. But at this period of the correspondence he is still within the barracks' walls, or he jots down his letters in the railway stations or in crowded cattle cars. To begin to really know him, we must wait till he gets to the front, where, billeted in some little vil-

lage or held long hours on guard in the first-line trenches, he at last comes into contact with mother earth, when he immediately catches the spirit of the open and forthwith his native instincts are awakened. "Brought face to face with eternal things, suddenly his soul is like a chord which has been struck and you remark for the first time its original timbre and its infinite sensibility; nor are the notes casual and discontinuous, but gradually form an unbroken melody.

"To this tender meditative nature the violence of war naturally causes horror, and hence it is that he tries to discover the reason for violence. He finds that through violence an imperfect and provisional order of things is broken and what till then had been congealed, is put in motion, a new life begins and something better than before becomes possible. Thus, acceptance, submission to universal reason, confidence in what is coming to pass — this is the conclusion which he always reaches." Even violence and war are in the natural order of things and must be accepted.

The sentiment in these letters M. Chevrillon thinks gives them a place apart; "it is much more organic and profound than their thought,

. . . . this infiniteness and indefiniteness of their shades of meaning, their unison with the varying aspects of the landscape, in a word, their poetic power which is shared by the love for music, springing from the same primitive and unconscious soul of his being and participating in all his inflexions of rhythm and song. Here again comes out the Shelley in this young French poet," for as M. Chevrillon points out he sometimes uses one of the words frequently found in the vocabulary of that poet—weakness, *défaillance*. "Like the great English poet whom he does not seem to have known, what he seeks in things of beauty is the losing of oneself in the lyric state, the inexpressible and blissful sensation of melting into the object contemplated. What counts for him through these weary weeks, what he loves to recall afterwards, what he would ever find again and never lose are those supreme moments in which he felt self-forgetfulness because he had felt the ineffable." The simplest natural objects could give him such minutes.

Then comes the carnage of February, 1915, on which he touches but briefly because that side of the conflict does not appeal to him; and from this point on the narrative moves more rapidly

towards the dénouement. The young sergeant now has command of men and is brought face to face with serious and precise duties. But in the midst of the slaughter and the hurry of the service, come sudden and singular feelings of pity for it all and the strange solace of the infinite and tragic tranquillity of the night among the dead. "Now less is said about the landscape, the descriptions are more of a military and technical nature, and often the thought leaves the earth. Once only is there a return to a consideration of his own private affairs, a brief and profound plaint over the old lost hopes, the abandoned art work, and the greatness of the sacrifice.

"Sometimes a doubt comes over his mind. The ever-present association with death, bodily fatigue, the weary days of rain and mud, at moments check in him the manifestation of spiritual things. He is like the young plant of which he speaks in one of his letters — growing, aspiring, but suddenly feeling the breath of coming autumn with its cold. Then for an instant he asks himself if, after all, the universe be not an empty thing and if even sacrifice be not an illusion. But this despondent mood passes away quickly and he soon gains again the pure

tranquil regions higher up, which he leaves at last only in order to do his duty and participate in the final combat where his physical and mental struggles end forever.

“Thanks to a mercy which he never imagined would be his when he left the sweet solitude of an artist for the sweat, the servitude and the *mêlées* of the front, he doubtless there produced the best that was in him; and we may now well ask whether, in the regular course of an artist’s existence, it would ever have been granted him to express himself in the fulness and beauty found in these letters. It is in this thought that those who loved him find that comfort which makes their loss bearable. In these pages his soul is perhaps more ample and fair than they ever knew it. And we should remember that it was in a war that Marcus Aurelius wrote his *Meditations*.”

Since the outbreak of the present conflict, the statement has often been made that there is a religious revival in France. The same thing was said at the time of the war of 1870; but the years that followed showed that there was no solid foundation for the assertion. Everything in France today points in the same direction. It is idealism, which had never died, that suf-



fering has made shine forth with a brighter light. The pages of this little book offer a peculiar proof of the correctness of this affirmation. We find here a young man who, brought face to face with death and the great problems of the universe, reveals gradually the lofty soul of an ardent pantheist.

Still another peculiarity might be mentioned which brings out pleasantly the poetry and the pantheism of the author—his manner of dating many of his letters. As the military authorities in this war do not permit the names of places being put at the head of letters from the front, this young sergeant often heads his correspondence with such phrases as these: "A cloudy Sunday disturbed by yesterday's bombardment," or "The most beautiful sunny Sunday," or "A splendid afternoon," or "In the morning sunshine," or "In splendid weather which has become serene," or "A wonderful morning," etc.

Another characteristic of this correspondence should be noted—the exceptionally deep filial affection which pervades it; for it is very rare to see in a youth such intense love for a mother as is here displayed. Even if the woof and warp of these letters did not proclaim it in innumerable passages, the opening address would,

for there we find such phrases as these: "Dear much-loved Mother," or "Dear Mother dear," or "Dear dearest Mama," or "Very dear loved Mother," or "My little Mama," or "Dear loved Mother," or "Dearest," or "Very dear well-beloved Mother," or "Very dear Mama," etc.

And what a noble woman this beloved mother—"the bond that holds me strongest to life"—must be to have been the soul-companion of such a son! One regrets that her letters do not accompany those with which they are so intimately associated—letters which, he says, have "a perfume I cannot get on without"; and when they come, he declares: "I am now full of joy and blessed with a complete peace of mind . . . these letters are our life . . . thy good and vivifying letters . . . how I love them; each of thy letters feeds me with what is dearest to me in life."

In order to be still more one with him, this "mother of mine" reads Tolstoy because the son has read him; and Spinoza, because "he is a precious help to one in the trenches"; and Verlaine, because "in Paris he was one of my almost daily delights." In order to enter more fully into his art life, she takes up drawing

again, "for it will be a source of delight to us both." She likes to sit in his deserted studio—"You cannot imagine how much comfort I get from knowing that you are interested so deeply in my things at home . . . . that you read my books and love to look at my dear engravings." She writes to him of Gustave Moreau's pictures, and he answers: "This grand genius had the same intuition you have had . . . . whose spirit, in a word, you have divined." She sends him "a nice aluminum cup," which "is admired by all the men"; "dainties which are fully appreciated"; "woolen things which are precious and victorious" over the cold; periodicals, *La Chanson de Roland*, etc., and he writes back: "Poor mamas! How they rack their brains to find what they can do for us. . . . What terrible anxieties the poor mamas have in this war." And in turn, he sends her his sketches, his poems, his prayers.

But it may be that her letters have, with her son, "disappeared" forever.

THEODORE STANTON

*Cornell Campus, May, 1917*



A SOLDIER OF FRANCE TO HIS MOTHER



# A SOLDIER OF FRANCE TO HIS MOTHER

## LETTERS FROM THE TRENCHES ON THE WESTERN FRONT

*August 6, 1914.*

These are my first days as a soldier, and they are full of life. The fatigue is very different from what I imagined it would be. I am in a state of great nervous tension due to a lack of sleep and exercise. I am leading the existence of a bureaucrat, having been assigned for duty to what is called the *Dépôt*, that is to say to the military clerical force which attends to all the services even when the troops are away, and which in the end goes forward to fill up the gaps which may occur on the firing-line. What we miss most is not having any news of what is going on outside of this little town where newspapers no longer penetrate.

*August 13.*

Still no news, and I am told it will be so for some days to come, as the censorship is being

applied with increasing rigor. Our time passes very quietly here. The weather is magnificent, and calmness and confidence are in the air. We are thinking of those who are fighting in the heat, and this thought causes us to find our own situation really too fine. The *morale* of these reservists is excellent.

*Sunday, August 16.*

I took a walk today along the banks of the Marne, in weather made all the more charming by a shower. A moment's change of this kind is very agreeable in these troubled times. We are still without any news, just as you are; but fortunately we are blessed with a lot of patience. I have found some pleasure in feasting my eyes on the landscape hereabouts, notwithstanding the invasion of red trousers and blue coats. What a fine impression, by the way, you get of the *morale* of these same red trousers and blue coats. We are sending many of them forward and they all accept their part tranquilly.

*August 19.*

The monotony of military life benumbs me; but I do not complain. The same characters with whom I was acquainted nine years ago,

when I did my military service, come back to me again, more mellowed, improved and all more on a common level now than then; especially are we all now under the influence of the great events which the news from the eastern frontier keeps constantly before our minds.<sup>1</sup> The ordinary comradeship of the barracks gives place to a more admirable spirit of solidarity, and everybody is trying to do his best to adapt himself to the surroundings. One of the advantages of our present situation is that we can play at soldier without feeling that we are wasting our time. All these rather puerile and simple occupations now present their useful and immediately practical side; so you do everything in a calm spirit and nothing gets on your nerves. And what exerts a still further quieting effect over all these men is a deep, vague sentiment of fraternity which turns all hearts towards those who are on the firing-line. Each one feels that the little discomforts which we have to put up with are a very feeble contribution to the common welfare when compared with the terrible tribute of every sort of energy and devotion now exacted at the frontier.

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<sup>1</sup> The reference is to the French successes in Alsace.

*August 25.*

This letter precedes but little our own departure from this place. The terrible shock at the front calls for our presence with those who are fighting there already. I leave you both, Grandmother, and thee, my Mother, with the hope of seeing you again. I feel sure that you will approve my doing everything that duty demands. But nothing has happened to cause us to despair of success; France still sees clearly the part she is called upon to play in this crisis.

Please say to all those who have any love for me that I am thinking of them as I make my preparation for departure, but that unfortunately I have no time to write to anybody now. I am in the very best of health. After such a change in the situation as that about to occur, we may say that all our preceding experiences belong to a dead past. Let us have recourse to all our energy, dear Mama, to adapt ourselves to an entirely different existence, however hard it may be for both of us to do so. You may be sure that I shall not go out of my way to do things that will endanger our happiness; but I shall so act that my own conscience and yours will be satisfied. So far in this campaign I can

find no fault with my conduct, and I intend to continue on those lines.

*August 25.*

A second letter this same day to tell you that instead of our regiment going, it is Pierre's. I had the joy to see him pass right by me while I was on guard in town and accompanied him for some one hundred yards, and then we said good-bye. I somehow feel that he and I shall meet again. The regiment left with flowers in the barrels of their guns, and singing. We both got much comfort out of thus being together to the end. That was a fine action on the part of André<sup>1</sup> to save the life of that soldier who was drowning. Nobody imagines all the heroism there is in France and in the intellectual youth of Paris.

This is a grave hour for us. The country is not destined to die, but its deliverance will be secured only at the price of a terrible effort. As regards our losses, I know we have had whole divisions swept away; some regiments haven't an officer left. As for how I feel about all this, you will find my opinions in the first letter sent you today. I would be ashamed to think for

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<sup>1</sup> Second Lieut. Cadoux killed in battle April 13, 1915.



an instant of screening myself when the welfare of our race demands my sacrifice. My only purpose should be to carry with me a clear conscience as far as my feet can do it.

*August 26.*

*My dear Mama:* I have been made happy by reading a fine article of Maurice Barrès in the *Echo de Paris*, entitled "The Eagle Outflies the Nightingale."<sup>1</sup> It expresses exactly my sentiments.

Though these *Dépôts* may contain the poorer material of our military body, much excellent energy is still left there; and though I do not yet dare to class myself as a part of this element, I do expect in the end to go to the front with it. Our regimental doctor has excused me from carrying a knapsack; but I carry it all the same in order to get myself into training; and I feel no bad effects from so doing.

The only thing I can speak to you of with

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<sup>1</sup> From "L'Armée Française et la Guerre," p. 84, where one reads: "Writers, tear up the interrupted page; poets, abandon your song, even if it be in the midst of a strophe and however exactly it reflects your soul. Even say a hasty good-bye to your heart of yesterday, for when you come back from the Rhine, you will have mounted so high and on such strong wings that you will surpass all your dreams, as the eagle outflies the nightingale."



perfect confidence, is my own moral and physical state, which is excellent. The real death would be to live in a conquered land, especially for me whose artistic inspirations would be killed thereby. I keep isolated as much as possible, and from the intellectual point of view I am quite intact. The fact is that the atmosphere of the barracks of today is much more endurable than it is in ordinary times. The only really disagreeable thing is that these constant changes of place and occupation drag us about from one billet to another so that our growing confidence in the military situation is being constantly checked by our thus being incessantly brought face to face with these unexpected material surroundings.

*August 30.*

*My little Mama:* Though it is true that we didn't get off yesterday, it is now only a question of hours when we start. I will not repeat what I have already said to you. I am glad you approve my course; I knew you would do so. As the moment for the final effort approaches, all weaknesses disappear. During yesterday's very hard march only one man fell out, and he was really ill. France will get out

of this awful scrape with flying colors — mark my word. I can only repeat, as regards myself, what I have already said, viz., I am ready for whatever happens. But nothing can blot out our twenty-seven years of happiness. I am resolved not to regard myself as a victim singled out in advance for sacrifice. I still cling to the belief that I shall have the joy to return safe and sound; and yet I am ready to go to the limits of my strength in doing my duty, wherever it may lead. You cannot imagine how ashamed I would be if I felt that I could do more than I am doing. In the midst of all these sad things, we are still living hours of splendor where objects which were once so strange to us, now take on an august significance.

*Six a. m., September 4, in a moving train.*

Here I am forty hours on a journey whose picturesqueness outbalances its extreme discomforts. The great trouble is to get any sleep, and the problem is not easily solved when you are forty men penned up in a single cattle car. At every moment the train stops to make way for trains filled with the unfortunate civil population who are being removed from the war zone. Then come the trains carrying the

wounded, a fine patriotic spectacle; then those with the English army, the artillery, etc. We know nothing about what is going on, as we no longer have any newspapers and we cannot put any dependence on the rumors which circulate among the terror-stricken inhabitants of the towns we pass through. Splendid weather.

*Saturday, September 5, after sixty hours in a cattle train, forty men to a car.*

During the same day we followed the course of the Seine, along the borders of Fontainebleau forest, and the shores of the Loire, catching glimpses of the castle of Blois and that of Amboise. Unfortunately, night coming on we couldn't see anything more. Imagine the tender emotions which those magnificent banks of the Loire awakened in my breast!

Are you bombarded by those terrible flying machines? At those moments I think of you both, and especially of poor old grandmother, who might have been spared such sights. But let us hope for the best.

We learn from the wounded who are being brought back, that during the first days of August our general staff made some mistakes and that these faults have been pitilessly paid for;

and now it is for us to repair these blunders.<sup>1</sup> The English troops are pouring in; we have passed numerous trains crowded with them. In a word, this war isn't going to be the mere military parade that many believed it would be, an opinion I did not share. It will stir up all the good in humanity; and I say nothing of the magnificent spectacles which will not bear directly on the war. Nothing that is good will be lost.

*September 5; first stage of our journey; caged up for sixty hours and impossible to stretch oneself.*

Still in contact with the iron rails and a victim of continual jolting. But after each horrible night has come, three times, the glory of the morning; and then all the fatigue vanishes as if by enchantment. We have traversed in all directions the territory of France, from the rather barren serenity of Champagne, so full of subtleties, to the rich and robust placidity of Brittany. On the way, we followed along the Loire with

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<sup>1</sup> The French staff expected the main German attack to come through the Alsatian frontier and not by way of Belgium. The rushing of the regiment mentioned in the text to Northwestern France was to meet the main German attack from this unexpected quarter. The events mentioned above are those leading up to the battle of the Marne.

its sonorous and noble shores. O my beautiful native land, heart of the world where reposes what is divine on earth, what monster has fallen upon thee? Some creature jealous of thy beauty! Formerly I loved France with a sincere love which was, however, somewhat diletantish. I loved her as an artist proud to live in the most beautiful of lands; but, to tell the truth, I loved her rather as a picture might love its frame. This present horror was necessary to awaken in me all that is filial and profound in the bonds which bind me to my native country.

*September 7.*

We have embarked on the great adventure without any dominant sensation unless it be a rather fine acceptance of fatality—we are ready for whatever comes—but our sensibility is kept ever on the alert by the sight of the victims, especially by the fleeing civilians. Poor souls, true exiles, or rather dead leaves flying before the whirlwind; little bodies acting a part in a great event. Whole cattle trains are loaded down with them. Into these cars are crowded these poor, desolated, up-rooted beings suddenly fallen to the level of dumb, driven cattle. Misery has stripped them of all human char-



acteristics. We give them water to drink and food to eat and then it is that we find out what they really are. The husband will drink his fill quite forgetful of wife and children. The mother thinks of her baby, but other women take their time in enjoying their refreshments quite oblivious of the fact that others like them are thirsting and in hunger. Among these waifs of war an old woman touched me to the heart. She was a grandmother of eighty-seven, shaken and bruised by the jolts of the cars, by turns put down from and put back into these rolling cages; now trembling, now seemingly abandoned, and her head fairly swimming in the midst of it all.

*September 10.*

We have arrived in a region where we hear only good news.<sup>1</sup> We get very clearly the impression that France is saved. From the official report which succinctly and formally declares that we have met with success, down to the fantastic rumors which circulate, everything corroborates this feeling that we have gained a victory.

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<sup>1</sup> The battle of the Marne was underway.

*September 13.*

Here we are at the war front, approaching the horrors of the firing-line. We have left the villages of France where peace is still slumbering. Now all is tumult and we begin to see victims right from the battle—soldiers covered with blood, mud, and grime. There are wounded, too. Those whom we first met are the least hurt—wounded in hand or arm. In the case of most of them, you discover that, along with their fatigue and suffering, is a real feeling of relief at having escaped, relatively, so cheaply. Further along, in the direction of the ambulances, a burial of the dead is under way—six bodies stretched on two carts. Flattened out and half hidden under their rags, they are being carried to a ditch dug at the foot of a cross-road calvary.<sup>1</sup> Priests are present though they can scarcely be said to be officiating, as they too are in uniform and not in their sacerdotal robes. A thin covering of straw and some holy water sprinkled over the bodies complete the ceremony, such as it is, and we pass on. But after all, these corpses are the fortunate ones,

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<sup>1</sup> A representation of the crucifixion consisting sometimes of three crosses with figures of Christ and the thieves, often life-size, set up on a hillock or by the roadside in Roman Catholic countries.

for they have died with some care shown them, which cannot be said of those lying further along, who have passed into the other world, dying abandoned after nights of lonely misery. From the midst of this woe arises in our hearts a deep feeling of pity, fraternity, and kindness.

*Wednesday, September 16.*

In the zone of horrors. The waning twilight throws a pale hue over the road when suddenly we perceive a ditch full of the dead bodies of those who had dragged themselves there from the bordering fields—to die. They are just as they were when they fell and are already an offense to the nostrils. The increasing night makes it the harder to distinguish their nationality. But an all-embracing pity envelopes the whole mass, and for each we have this same exclamation: “Poor boy!” Such ignominies are always associated with night; then comes the morning. The day breaks on a heap of swollen bodies of horses. At the corner of a wood many men have fallen in a carnage which has now quieted down. There they lie showing evidences of the agonies they have suffered. Decay has already discolored them. They have all been robbed, too. Their knap-



sacks have been opened and their haversacks turned inside out; none of their belongings has been left. Among them are civilians whose presence there is explained by the German custom which forces French hostages to precede the soldiers. Such a fact should stir in honorable hearts a horror for the callous crime of those responsible for this war, in which there will never be enough glory to conceal all this blood and beastliness.

*September 21.*

Rain in war time is a torment beyond imagination. Here we have had three days and nights of it, during which all we could do was to shiver and complain; and notwithstanding the downpour, the various services had to be carried on. There is nothing in Dante which equals having to sleep in a ditch full of water; and what is to be said of the awakening, when you are forced to attend the moment to kill or be killed? Overhead the screaming of the shells drowns the whistling of the wind, while the rattle of rifle fire intermingles its music from time to time. Then you simply curl up in the mud and let despair take possession of you. When these torments come to an end, I have sometimes

had such a nervous reaction that I have simply sat down and cried without knowing why. This is what is called filling the outposts after a combat.

*September 25.*

This is hell in the calmest and most sylvan of spots; an autumnal land which the cannon are tearing to pieces and pitting with great shell craters.

*September 27.*

If, outside of the magnificent lesson taught by this war, there are any immediate advantages, that which affects me the most is the contemplation of the sky at night. Never before has the majesty of night brought me so much consolation as in the midst of these trials. Sparkling Venus is my friend, and now I am quite familiar with the constellations. There are those which trace great curves in the heavens as if they would encircle the throne of God. What glory, and how it brings to memory the Chaldean shepherds, astrological figures, and the first alphabet!<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The ancient Chaldeans were famous astrologers and the inventors, with the Babylonians, of cuneiform characters.

*October 1.*

I may tell thee, Mama, that from the intellectual standpoint I have been living some admirable days during which all idle preoccupations were driven out of me by a new spirit which came in.

If you ever have a weak moment, and if a single one of these letters reaches you, I hope it will make clear to you how edifying and how precious these trials have been to me. Our suffering should be considered in every instance a most wonderful source of emotions and formation of conscience. I know not whither destiny leads me, but it is not—this I am sure of—towards the haughty and artificial regions of pure speculations, but rather in the way of all the smaller duties of each day; and into this work I must carry a spirit awake to every sensation.

I can now see how an upright nature may easily get on without having recourse to artifice in expression in order to act and exercise a salutary influence. This is precious knowledge which will enable me, if I ever get back alive, to suffer less in case I am wounded in such a way as never to be able to paint again.

*October 9.*

It appears that we are about to be ordered to make an attack. So I don't wish to take this big risk without sending thee, Mother, my thoughts in these few moments of tranquillity which we now enjoy. Every thing here tends to peace of heart—the beauty of the wood in which we are living and the absence of all intellectual complications. It is paradoxical, as you have so truly said, but the finest moments of my moral life have just been passed. Yes, there will always be beauty on earth. Man will never be so bad as to destroy it all. I have amassed a stock of beauty sufficient to furnish my whole life. May the days to come cause to fructify all that I have at present collected. There is one thing that nobody can take from us—the soul-treasure that we have.

*October 12.*

So far thy love and Providence have not abandoned me. We are still in these magnificent but devastated woods, enjoying most beautiful autumn weather. Nature offers us many joys with which to dominate these horrors. Whatever may be the suffering reserved for us, I have a profound and powerful trust that all will end well.

*October 14.*

*Dear Mother:* Of course, there are sacrifices which cost a great effort, but you know we both possess the strength of soul necessary to enable us to live through these trying present moments without becoming too impatient for the return home which we both so long for. The essential thing now is to appreciate fully the present moment and to get out of it all the good and beautiful and edifying that are in it. Anyway, we cannot tell what the future has in store for us, and it would be a useless and vain torture for us to live always asking what is coming. Do you not find that life has showered on us many pleasures and that one of the latest and greatest is our being able at last to communicate with one another and feel how united we are? There are many poor fellows here who do not know where are their wives and children and who have been thus isolated for the whole past month. You see we are still among the privileged ones.

Dear Mother, less than ever should we despair, for never before have we been so convinced that all these agitations and human deliriums are as nothing in comparison with the eternal spark which each of us bears in his breast, and that all these monstrosities will end

in a better future. This war is a form of cataclysm which succeeds to the ancient upheavals of our globe. But have you not remarked that in the midst of all this destruction not a particle of the soul is lost and the belief in the existence of a superior law has never been lessened an iota?

Our sufferings all come from the fact that our little stock of human patience is framed in accordance with our appetites, which is open to objection even if these appetites be of the noblest. But the moment this patience seeks to discover the harmony in things, then it meets with perfect repose of soul. It may be that this present disorder is really leading the world towards a more definite, universal well-being.

Dear Mama, clinging firmly to every human hope, I send to thee and to dear grandmother my profoundest love. I send, too, my whole heart to our friends who are in trouble. Help them to bear their burdens; two crosses are more easily borne than one. Have confidence in the eternal joy which awaits us.

*Seven a. m., October 15.*

I have received your card of October first. It fills me with joy to find ourselves once again



so united, though, to tell the truth, in thought we have never been separated. I note what you say of the misfortune of Martha, and I am glad you can be of some aid to her. Dear Mother, that is what we both have to do—be useful at the present moment without thought of the moment which follows. Yes, it is true that I feel very much as you do, that I have a mission in life. But we must act at each instant as though this mission were on the point of immediate accomplishment. Don't let us keep some little corner in our hearts in which to hide our trivial hopes. We must absolutely attain the point where no catastrophe can render our life a broken one, interrupted, and inharmonious. That is a fine work and it is the work of the moment. As for the rest, that future into which we must not try to penetrate, you will see, dearest Mother, what beauty, what good, and what justice it has in store for us. None of our faculties should strive to no purpose, and every vain inquietude is a harmful dispensing of these faculties. You must find some comfort in this superb assurance that so far I have been able to raise my soul to a height, and keep it there, where passing events have not been able to get possession of it and where I promise



you I will make every effort to render it impregnable.

Please say to Martha that if fate strikes down the best, there is nothing unjust in this, for the bad that survive are made better by it. She must accept the sacrifice, feeling that it has a useful end. You do not know the lesson taught by him who falls. I do. For him who knows how to read life, these present events have torn to shreds our old habits of thought and have revealed more clearly than ever before eternal beauty and order. We must recover from the surprise caused by this tearing to pieces of venerable ideas, and adapt ourselves as quickly as possible to this new variety of things which renders us as privileged as was Socrates, the Christian martyrs, and the victims of the French revolution. Then we will disdain what in life is only temporary and turn with a fresh longing for what this existence offers us so rarely—a thorough appreciation of what is eternal.

*October 16.*

We are having a few days of relative calm. Between two tempests my company has earned a merited repose, and I am enjoying hugely this

October weather. Your nice letter of the second has come, and I am now full of joy and blessed with a complete peace of mind. Let us go on arming ourselves with courage. Do not let us even speak of having patience. Let us speak only of the present moment with all the treasures that it brings us. That is all we have to do; there alone is concentrated all the beauty to be found in this world. Beauty exists, dear Mother, quite outside of the circle where we are in the habit of looking for it. Have recourse to your own strength of character and your love for me to discover it and to help others to discover it. This new beauty has nothing in common with the conception expressed by health, or family, or country. You find it when you distinguish in everything what is eternal. But let us at the same time cherish that delightful intuition that we are going to meet again; that will not in any way prevent us from performing our allotted task.

Please tell Martha that I often think of her. Alas! her case is not unique. This war has destroyed many hopes; so, dear Mother, let us place our hope where no war can touch it—down in the very bottom of our hearts, or above in the lofty heights of our soul.

*Three p. m., October 17.*

My writing thee and knowing that my letters reach thee are a daily paradise to me. I fairly long for the hour when I am free to write to thee. Yes, loved Mother, you must, indeed, feel that thy courage and thy desire to live have taken on a new life. But one must never consider as a fair reason for wishing to live the enjoyment of a single affection, however worthy it may be. No accident should make it possible for us to forget the reason for our living. Of course, we might prefer this or that mission in life, but we should accept the one which presents itself, however surprising or short it may be. I share thy feeling that happiness is in store for us. But do not let us think about that; let us rather think about what we have to do today and all the sacrifices which it demands.

*October 22.*

I accept cheerfully whatever destiny has in store for me, but at the same time I pluck from it all the happiness which it hides in the fold of each moment. Ah! if men only knew how much peace of mind they waste, how much is sometimes embraced in one minute of time, they

would suffer less from the violence around them. Doubtless, there may be extreme tortments of which I am ignorant and which, perhaps, try the soul in a way I do not suspect; but however that may be, I exert every effort of soul and body to accept resignedly whatever the passing moment may bring. What you must accustom yourself to is to recognize love and beauty triumphant over every kind of violence. It is not a few brief seasons of hatred and fraud which can suppress eternal beauty and of that beauty we all have an imperishable supply.

*October 23.*

*Very dear Mama:* I have re-read the Barrès article, "The Eagle Outflies the Nightingale."<sup>1</sup> It is still as beautiful a bit of writing as ever, but is now out of tune with the spirit of the moment. Now, nothing exists outside of the absolute present; the rest is like the ornaments one puts aside for festive occasions which are a long way off and may never come. But one guards these ornaments preciously in one's chest of drawers. This is what I am doing with the treasures of the affections, and with all my legitimate ambi-

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<sup>1</sup> See page 6.

tions and praiseworthy aspirations. I have thrown a covering over them all and I live only in the passing moment.

The beautiful sky of this morning brought back to me what I was playing yesterday—music which filled me to overflowing with happiness. Forgive me if I do not live in a continually nervous state over the thought of my return and our meeting. I think you will approve my course in placing this dear hope of ours in other hands than our own.

*October 27.*

If, as I most ardently hope, I am to have the joy of seeing thee again, you will learn of the miraculous way I have been watched over by Providence. I have simply bowed before a force and goodness which have surpassed all my pride could have conceived. I may say that God has been in me as I have been in Him, and I have made a determined vow to try and always feel such communion. You see, the question is to use life not as one may understand it, even in the matter of our noblest affections, but by saying to one's self: Let us eat and drink to all that is eternal, for tomorrow we may be dead to all that is human. In this way

you find your love increase in proportion as you abandon all disturbing and petty hopes.

*October 28.*

Here we are near the end of the third month of a terrible contest whose lessons will be broad and salutary, not only for him who will heed them but for the world in general, which is perhaps the only consoling fact that springs from this awful catastrophe. Let us trust that it may bring comfort to those whose hopes are linked with the hopes of the combatants. This solace will be found in the decidedly superhuman feeling that all the divine and immortal energy which agitates our kind, far from being weakened, is, on the contrary, exalted and increased in value after such a storm as this. Happy he who can hear the note of peace, as in a pastoral symphony, but thrice happy he who has a presentiment of it while still in the midst of the tumult. And what difference does it make if this magnificent premonition comes to pass in the absence of the prophet? He who divined it gleaned from it much joy on earth, and one greater than we decides whether in this instance our mission has been accomplished.



October 28. Second letter, written almost the same hour.

*Dear Mother dear:* Another nice moment to pass with thee. Of course, we can only go on saying the same thing. But the thought is so fine that we can always find new forms in which to present it. But, dearest one, I dare express no wish about the future. I must not. I do not think we should even consider whether there may be a partial quieting down of things here at the front. Anyway, I can assure thee that the effort required to endure the hardships here is not so painful as the moral difficulties which you and I have had to pass through since the war broke out. We can, however, go on trying to keep up a sort of continual resistance against the bad in us, and leave every door open for the good which may come from without.

I am glad you are reading Tolstoy. He, too, has seen war, has judged it, and has accepted the lessons which it teaches. If you can get a glance at that admirable book, *War and Peace*, you will find in it situations which will remind you of our present state. He will show you how well situated the soldier is to indulge in contemplation, if he desires it. As regards the constraint to which the soul might be subjected



through lack of material comforts — don't believe in any of that; it is all false. Though it is true that our life is like that of the rabbit when the shooting season opens, yet we can enrich the soul in the most magnificent fashion. To-day overhead we have the sky filled with cold flying clouds such as the Dutch landscapists like to paint.

*October 30.*

I am writing thee in the midst of a magnificent landscape, a gray autumnal day lashed by the wind. But to me the wind is never sad, as it wafts to me the spirit of the regions which lie behind the hills.

This horrible war cannot separate us from our intellectual possessions. In spite of the moments of awful tumult we return to ourselves again at about the same point where we were before. I would even say that the ordinary course of our present existence has developed our sensibilities to a degree where we are susceptible to the most delicate impressions. It is possible that we may go from one extreme to the other, and that the thick-skinned people who will follow us may be mere brutes; but however that may be, this present crisis, through

which the soul is now passing, can only be profitable to us.

Yesterday we were in a pretty village of the Meuse region whose grace was increased by the contrast with the surrounding ruins. I was able to get a shirt washed there, and while it was drying, I chatted with the worthy old woman who risks her life every day in order to protect her hearth. She has three sons and they are all in the army; but she has no recent news of them, though one of them passed recently within a few miles of her. She knew it, but couldn't see him. Another one of these typical French peasant women is guarding her son-in-law's house where are six children.

The duty lies in accepting whatever comes and having, at the same time, perfect confidence in eternal justice. Don't stop to consider the personality of those who remain or those who go. If you do, you are simply weighing with human scales. Now we must ever distinguish in us the enormous quantity of what is better than human. Dear Mother, have absolute confidence. In what? We both feel it instinctively.

*Ten a. m., October 31.*

Up to the present, the spirit of renunciation

has had full possession of me. But now I must go still further in the ways of wisdom and be quite ready to accept whatever happens in the days to come. I must get myself into a state of mind where I shall feel that it will make no difference if the runner's feet get caught in the trap, when, of course, he cannot reach the goal. But is he more worthy who grovels lest otherwise he might fall into it?

*Eight a. m., November 1. All Saints' Day.*

Last night I got thy card of the twenty-fourth and twenty-fifth ultimo. While you were looking at that moon hidden from us, you felt—and here you were wrong—discouraged, whereas, there was the best of ground for your having hope, for at that very same moment I was being protected by Providence in a way that simply humbles all one's pride.

The next day we had a most beautiful sunrise, which mingled its rays with the purple of the autumnal wood, in this very region where I made sketches three years ago. But we are now at the point in this country where the landscape becomes more striking, broadens out and even takes on something that is pathetic in its majesty. It is impossible to give thee an idea

of the horizon. It appears that we are to stay for some time in this magnificent district, and here All Saints' Day finds us. At this moment I am writing thee in the midst of the silvery rays of a sun rising through the mists of the valleys. This whole area seems to be slumbering for twenty-five miles round about and the battle scarcely troubles the religious calmness of the scene.

I am glad you like my proposed picture, which binds me still closer to my destiny. If I have the good fortune to return alive, the form may undergo some changes, but the essence of it is contained in the sketch which I have sent thee.

*Noon.*—A splendid All Saints' Day profaned by violence. But glory be to the day!

*November 2. All Souls' Day.*

A splendid festival of sun and joy in the glorious nature of a Meuse landscape. Hope is pressed back into the heart, not daring to disturb the grief of those to whom this day is the first stage in their mourning. Dear much-loved Mama, twenty-eight years ago you were in mourning and in hope; today, mingled with your anxiety, is much hope. These new trials do not find thee at the same age as then; a whole

life of resignation has prepared thee to bear up bravely for this supreme effort of wisdom.

What voluptuousness there is in this constant vibration in the breast of nature! For instance, this same horizon which I saw awaken this morning, was bathed last evening in a pink light, while a full moon rose in a soft sky against which were outlined, in coral and saffron, the notched tops of the trees. Dearest, have you today this beautiful sun which we have? How noble the country looks and how good nature is. She tells all those who will hear her that nothing will be lost.

Dearest one, this terrible martyrology of the *élite* of the French youth cannot go on growing indefinitely. It is impossible that what is best in a whole race should disappear. To bring out the genius of a nation there is something better than war. I seem to feel that a nobler day awaits us. Hope, ever hope!

I have received dear grandmother's letter.

*November 4.*

I live only by thy thought and in the benediction of nature. This morning our chiefs threatened us with a long march of twelve miles, and this threat was carried out in the form of a

charming tramp through a country which I love so much. We saw an exquisitely thin mist, due to the temperate heat of the sun, rise hour after hour from the surface of the earth. At a distance we distinguished lofty plateaus, from which the view must have been extensive, all of whose outlines came out clearly or were easily divined in the haze. We remarked hills, covered with trees, which presented charming contours. It all made me think of the primitives and their landscapes so full of feeling and so conscientious. What fastidious majesty, whose grandeur seizes you at the first glance and whose details make a profound impression on you. You perceive, dear Mother, how God dispenses graces which are far above the reach of the miseries of the hour.

The question of patience is, in our eyes, a buried one, since we no longer measure time; how long such or such a thing is to last does not concern us. So what an ocean of emotions rushes in on the minute which is ours. Such is our life — that is, thine and mine — about which I have been writing thee, that nothing which may happen can render it a thing which has not been completed, which has been interrupted in the making; and I am determined to hold on to



this wisdom. But at the same time I would ally it with another sort of wisdom which has to do with the future, even though this future be a region into which we may not put foot. So, while we accept the whole present—and how many treasures it brings us—let us prepare for the future.

*Eight a. m., November 5.*

*Dear Mother:* Please don't hide from me any of your troubles and occupations in Paris. Whatever you decide is for the best. My happiness lies in that peace of mind which springs from my knowing that your own soul is calm in the midst of all this turmoil.

The weather continues to be fine and very mild. Today, without leaving the beautiful region where we have been since September 20, we have returned to the woods. I like it less than the free stretch of country, but there are fine little spots here, and the sky, now that the leaves have fallen, looks down upon us so tenderly and beautifully, even in the woods.

I am expecting a letter from thee. You cannot imagine how much longer a day is without home news. It is true that I have the old let-



ters, but the new one has a perfume that I can no longer get on without.

*November 6.*

Yesterday, without knowing why, I felt a little low spirited. The soldiers call it having the blues.<sup>1</sup> It was due, probably, because last evening I mislaid a notebook which I had intended sending you in an express package. Though there was nothing of a warlike nature in day before yesterday's events, still they so upset me that I didn't attend to that express package as I had intended to do. So now I am anxious about it for two reasons. In the first place, lest the package never reaches you, and so these notes, which describe my life from the first to the twentieth of October, get lost;<sup>2</sup> and in the second place, I am worried lest the package arrive before the letter explaining it.

Today we are blest with a Corot landscape with its delicate and intimate touch. From the barn where we have established our outposts I see, in the foreground, the highroad dotted with

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<sup>1</sup> Avoir le cafard.

<sup>2</sup> Such was not the case, however, as extracts from this notebook have been given in the preceding pages of this volume.

puddles of water left by the recent rain; then a lot of tree stumps, and next, beyond a meadow, a line of willows along the banks of a charming babbling brook. In the background are some houses, half veiled in a light mist, which give the dainty dark dash to the picture, those sombre hues which our dear landscapist felt and depicted in such a noble manner. And this is the peacefulness of our morning. But who would believe that you have simply to turn your head in another direction to see only burnings and ruins!

*Eight a. m., November 7.*

I have just received thy card of the thirtieth, announcing the sending of a package. How nice of you. How you all think of us. All these dainties which you send are fully appreciated.

Yesterday was a delicious November day, but this morning there is too much fog to be able to enjoy the pleasures of nature. But what an afternoon that of yesterday was! The atmosphere was delicate and refined, and every object was outlined in a misty veil. The little wood near our guardhouse has been taken possession of by a flock of green birds with white-bordered

wings, the males having black heads with a white spot. What a whiz they made in the surrounding tranquility. Here we have another example of gentleness in the midst of these warring folk. There can be only a certain amount of wickedness in the world, and as at the present moment all this wickedness is reserved by men for their own kind, the lower animals are taking advantage of the situation—at least the birds are, who, under normal conditions, are our victims. You see this in the feeling of security which has taken possession of the little forest animals—the mice and ground rats, for instance. The other day, hidden among the branches, I watched the goings and comings of these tiny rodents, who were as pretty as a Japanese picture, with the inside of their ears as pink as a shell. And, too, we have seen the cranes starting for a warmer clime. There is something very moving in their cry in the twilight.

I am so glad you have taken up drawing again, for it will be a source of delight to us both. You cannot imagine my longing to be in a position where I can paint all we feel. In reading my more recent letters, you must have felt what are my privations as well as my joys.

*Seven a. m., November 9.*

We are back in an open country again, which is what I like so much. But unfortunately we get glimpses of it only through the loopholes of our trenches. But then we must be thankful for favors, small though they be. During the past few days I have been enjoying the charm of the country reposing in the calmness of autumn. But this peacefulness was interrupted yesterday by the poignant sensation of a burning village, and though this was not the first one we have seen go up in flames, it was the first for some time. We were all at our lookouts when, in the middle of the night, it occurred. From the heights where we are stationed, we could see the big glare, and when daylight came, this charming village, which was sheltered in a little valley, was simply a smoking mass in the silver cloud of a glorious morning. From our rat hole we saw in the distance the highway with its graceful bends, the brook lined with willows, the cross-road calvary—all this harmony ending in the horror of destruction. We learned later that the Germans had set fire to this village when they found they had to give it up after a furious fight which lasted two nights. This action would seem to indicate that they are about to

retire at this point. This way of proceeding, so generally disliked by our soldiers, is, I suppose, justifiable on the ground of strategic necessity, for when a village is thus blotted out, our services in the rear are considerably hampered thereby. So during the whole day we watched the havoc going on, while, over our heads, the little ground rats were engaged in making the most of the straw in which we are going to sleep later.

The existence of us infantry soldiers is much like that of rabbits during the shooting season. It has become a second nature with us, or, at least, with the more timid of us, to be always on the lookout for a hole to hide in, and as soon as we get into one, we are advised to stay there quietly. But this good advice is not always followed with discernment by those in authority. Thus, yesterday, four of us were in an advanced trench which was splendidly situated and quite hidden under branches. So here was an opportunity to enjoy in safety the beautiful view if it had not been for our well-intentioned corporal who was evidently worried lest we should have a nice little time all there alone by ourselves. Happily, the artillery and machine guns came up to where we were, made a terrible racket,

and showed us what superfluous precautions amounted to. So, with this example before us, we stayed where we were and how we were, and I was able to feast my eyes at will on the landscape, which, alas! was so tragic and smoky yesterday. But, dear Mother, you must not conclude from all this that I am imprudent, though the truth is that war makes you feel that all depends upon good luck, Providence, and destiny. I am always praying for the boon of a safe return, but if you except little lapses now and then into quite human impatience, I can say that the main object I always have in view is getting as much as possible out of the present moment.

*Eleven a. m., November 10.*

*Very dear Mama:* And what shall I write about today, so monotonous in its fog? I have been busy at trivial little occupations rendered all the more so by my working with those in whom I take no real interest. At such moments I simply crawl right into my own little shell and stay there.

Yesterday I wrote thee a long letter in which I said, among other things, how dear thy letters are to me. I am sometimes bored a little



on taking up paper and pen again, but when I finally find myself with thee, then I am happy once more and all the pleasant happenings of the day come pouring back to me for thee.

This morning our lieutenant sent me to get some wire at headquarters in a ruined village which we have had in our possession for the past six weeks. I went down there through plum orchards where the ground was covered with recently fallen fruit. Some of my more devil-may-care men began picking it up and putting it in baskets—all this forming a pastoral and bucolic picture in spite of the red trousers, rather faded after three months of campaign.

The little preferment which I have been given keeps me on the go from sunset until nine P. M., and ends with my sleeping in one of the dugouts or a barn instead of going back to the trenches for the night. So I don't enjoy pleasant evenings for reading, though sometimes in the trenches, when friend S. and I sleep side by side, we build up all sorts of castles together and furnish them with recollections of the past. The sciences and odd intellectual incidents carry us off into things legendary, and what pleasure I then get from discovering the wonderful possibilities which might spring from



this metal or that acid and suddenly finding myself back in my *Arabian Nights* days; and when we wake up, we may be greeted by a sunrise which surpasses all our fancies of the night before.

So here you have the life I have been leading since the thirteenth or the fourteenth of October. I don't ask for any thing better, and am contented, for in such a war as is this, we are enjoying, relatively, a rather easy-going existence.

You cannot imagine how much comfort I get from knowing that you are interested so deeply in my things at home — that you read my books and love to look at my dear engravings.

*Three p. m., November 12.*

Today we went on a march for exercise, and it was as agreeable as the first one. The weather was most beautiful. We could see the distant ridge of hills around Metz bathed in a blue and pink light, the immense stretch of country besprinkled with villages, some of which were wrapped in the full light of morning, while others we guessed the presence of rather than saw.

Here, in brief, is the way we now pass our

time: During three days we are kept near the enemy, living in well-constructed shelters which we improve each time we come back to them; then we have three days a little back of the front, and finally three days lodged in a near-by village, generally the same one. So we are leading a sort of hum-drum existence, at least, for the moment, and are getting somewhat acquainted with the civil population, which has had a pretty hard time of it. These people are good souls, especially the dear old dame in whose house I am writing you. She was my hostess the other time we stopped in this village, and she is doing everything in her power to try and make me feel at home. But, dear Mama, what brings home back to me is what I have in my heart. It is not eating on plates or sitting on a chair which counts; it is the love which I feel is near me — that's home to me.

Those woolen things are precious and are victorious!

*November 14.*

Since the twelfth, at eight thirty in the evening, we have been living in the probability of our taking part in a violent forward movement. We started out in the dark. Once in the calm

of nature, my thoughts clarified themselves a little after the two days of cantonment when the mind gets running a little too much on material things. We were moving blindly forward as reinforcements. We waited for things to be got ready for us to sleep in a barn, where we lay on the board floor from eleven o'clock in the evening until four in the morning. Then we were marched through the woods and fields, which the early daylight, breaking through the gray, red, and violet clouds, lit up little by little—the whole situation being romantic and affecting. When the morning, which was a fine one, was fully upon us, we learned that the troops which were ahead of us had caused the enemy great loss and had even got forward a bit. So we thereupon marched back to our old quarters and here I am again enjoying the splendor of our French country, so soul-stirring in this gray, windy, and impetuous November weather, where the sunlight is thrown in spots over a plain spreading off to the distant horizon.

Dear Mama, how fine this region really is—so vast and so worthy of admiration, where everything has a noble bearing and is so well proportioned; where there are no end of subjects which invite the artist's brush—roads bor-

dered with trees and running towards the frontier; rising hills behind which lie mists which probably hide the German Vosges mountains. Such is the scenery spread out before me.

But I have been enjoying something even better than it, perhaps. I refer to a melody of Beethoven and a piece by Liszt entitled "God's Benediction on Solitude." It is true that we haven't solitude here, but if you will glance over the poetry of Albert Samain,<sup>1</sup> you will find an epigraph from Villiers de l'Isle-Adam,<sup>2</sup> which runs: "One should remember that there will always be solitude on the earth for those who are worthy of it." This is the solitude of the soul which can turn a deaf ear to every thing which does not vibrate in accord with it.

I have received your two letters of the sixth and the seventh. Perhaps I may have another this evening. Yes, don't let us consider that there is any thing especially courageous on our part in going on with our various duties, even if our letters do not arrive promptly, though I am

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<sup>1</sup> A well known contemporary French poet (1858-1900). The epigraph mentioned in the text is attached to the poem "L'Allée Solitaire" in the collection, "Au Jardin de l'Infante."

<sup>2</sup> French symbolistic poet (1840-89). The original text of the epigraph runs: "Sache qu'il y aura toujours de la solitude sur terre pour ceux qui en sont dignes."

quite ready to admit that these letters are our life. It is through them that we communicate to one another our joys, our good fortunes, and the pleasures which we derive from knowing what is going on in the world at large. If your eyes trouble you, that is a sufficient cause for writing less. But, unless it be reasons of health, do not deprive me of thy heart which thy letters bring to me.

*November 14. Second letter.*

*Dear Mother whom I love:* Here we are back in our customary cantonment, and my heart is overflowing with thoughts which tend towards thee. I cannot tell thee everything I think each moment, though I do desire to share with thee the many joys scattered through our monotonous existence, as when a broken thread lets fall the beads on the sand. I would like to be able to turn to thee and say, "How beautiful that cloud is"; or, "How that broad landscape commands our respect," and then listen to the poetry of the wind from across the hills as we used to listen to it during our walks together about Boulogne. And then, while I am here, so many prosaic occupations prevent me from speaking to thee as I really feel. This is why I



sent that express package containing my notebook extending from August eighteenth to October twentieth. These notes were made when our knapsacks weren't so heavy and the bearer felt more like writing, and when, in the serenity of soul of those days in the trenches, where danger cut short idle talk, my whole being vibrated spontaneously. Since then I have discovered a joy much more intense, and large and full—writing to thee. This new period has become a sort of paradise to me. But I do not like cantonment life because the comforts and the feeling of security put the men in good spirits and create a turmoil which is unpleasant to me. You know how I always liked to be by myself and how I enjoyed solitude. But from this I don't want you to imagine that I haven't good friends here. The officers are very kind to me. But by exercising a little patience, and a few instants with my thoughts turning towards thee, I am quite happy again.

How kind this first half of November has been to me. I haven't suffered once from cold. And what beauties on every hand! This last All Saints' Day was one long song from beginning to end. The pure moonlight falling on the dark amber of the autumnal trees, until day



broke with its tender sounds of life, while the immense pink dream which was this plain, veiled in mist and leaning, as it were, on the near-by hills—what a hymn it all was. And many of the days since then have declared the glory of God. *Cæli enarrant*.<sup>1</sup> Here is one of those pleasures coming down from those ancient times—those beautiful Psalms.

*Seven a. m., November 15.*

Yesterday the weather was changeable. But I like such weather when you enjoy the shelter of cantonment, though on this occasion it made me a little nervous about our leaving to-night. But when I woke up this morning my mind was put at rest on this point, for we had the clearest sky imaginable, all glittering with stars. Nobody could have wished for anything better, and I was thankful beyond expression. What soldiers on the march dislike most of all is rain. It wets you through and through; you have no fire to dry yourself before, and nothing to shelter you from the downpour. Cold is nothing in comparison with rain; we can arm ourselves against cold.

How I appreciated the view of this enormous

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<sup>1</sup> The heavens declare the glory of God. Psalm 19, 1.

plain to which we marched down in a cutting wind. The low horizon gave a greater breadth to the broad sky which rose above it, where rare moments of pale sunshine recalled the azure glow which had disappeared. Then there was a dark tragic calvary at the roadside, and rows of trees looking like skeletons. What a fine scene. Such sights bring to mind thee and my dear music. Today I am in the right atmosphere.

Let me go a little into details concerning my views of a better future to be brought about by this war. These events are preparing the budding of a new life—the United States of Europe. When this conflict is ended, those who have performed all their filial duties towards their country will find themselves brought face to face with still greater responsibilities, which cannot be realized at the present moment. But here is the paramount duty—to try now to make the future secure. They must stretch every muscle to do away with all the causes of trouble between nations. The French Revolution, notwithstanding its shortcomings, certain backward steps in practical things, some weakness in its constructive measures, nevertheless impressed on humanity what was meant by na-

tional unity. Now the horrors of this war must do the same thing for European unity, for race unity. This new condition can be brought about only through suffering, spoliation, contests for years to come; but there can be no question that the door has opened on a new horizon.

*November 16.*

TO MADAME C.

*Very dear Madame and excellent Friend:* I cannot tell you how much pleasure and comfort your letter has brought me and how your warm friendship helps me to keep up my courage. What you tell me about my mother is the bond that holds me strongest to life. Many thanks for your constant and deep affection.

What can I tell you of my daily existence here? In the midst of fatigues and various vicissitudes, I am sustained by the contemplation of the beauties of nature around me, which for the past two months have enriched me with emotions and the pathetic things of this season of the year so rich in appeal to our religious sentiments. One of the spots where we stay the most is on the heights which overlook the immense Woëvre plain. Oh, how beautiful it

is. And what a benediction it is to be able to follow the changes in the view which each hour of the day and night brings and the modification in the foliage which each autumnal day produces. This fearful human turbulence has not succeeded in disturbing the majestic serenity of nature. It is true that at times man seems to surpass all imaginable restraints, but a penetrating soul distinguishes rapidly the harmony which dominates and conciliates all this discord. Please don't imagine that I rest insensible to the heart-rending spectacle in which we are plunged—villages, destroyed by savage artillery, smoking during the day and glaring at night; the misery of the poor inhabitants fleeing before the pursuing shells, etc. Every moment the heart receives a terrible shock; and it is for this very reason that I seek refuge in a loftier consolation, for, suffering also, I would not be able, otherwise, to bear up under the strain.

*November 17. Morning.*

*Dear Mother:* Filled with the joy of morning breaking on my dear village, I write thee. A rainy night has brought us pure, glorious weather. I see again my far-away horizon, my clear-cut hills, and the valleys with their

harmonious lines. Who would imagine, when viewed from the height where I am, that this rustic and peaceful village is really simply a mass of ruins, that not a house has escaped, that for the past two months nobody could stay there on account of the terrible artillery fire? While I write thee, the sun's rays are striking the church steeple which is framed by a tree still in somber shadow not far from me, while wide away above the last rises and the bluffs, the plain begins to disclose its delicate details bathed in a pinkish gold.

*Eleven a. m., November 17.*

How much consolation I get from this splendid weather. But I live much like an invalid sent to a fine country and whose treatment constrains him to perform some thankless and fatiguing task. As regards the situation at Leysin village, where the enemy lies, and our trench here, everything is as uncertain as can well be imagined. In fact nothing has happened to our company worth relating since October thirteen.

The way this war is being carried on is odd. It is like neighbors who are not on good terms. Just think of it—some of these trenches are scarcely more than a hundred yards apart, so



near in fact that the combatants can throw hand grenades at one another. Of course this means that these neighbors sometimes resort to very violent measures to show their dislike for one another.

As for myself, I am leading my own life only when I am with thee or when feasting my eyes on the natural splendors around me. Even in the midst of the talk going on about me, I manage to obtain a state of solitude in which to indulge in thought which is so necessary to me.

*November 18.*

When we awoke this morning, we found the ground covered with a hoar frost, a whiteness spread alike over hill and forest. My little village looks chilled to the core. I spent most of the night in a warmed shelter and I could have staid there the whole night, thanks to the kindness of the officers. But I am a fool and timid, and so I came back here and joined my companions from one to four-thirty this morning. It is a curious fact, but the cold doesn't seem to bother us much, largely perhaps on account of an admirable sort of a garment which nearly all of us have—a kind of flour bag which can be used as a cape or a sack to put



your feet in. In either case it keeps you very warm.

*Eleven o'clock.*—A lovely, touching air of Handel is, for the moment, running through my head; also an allegro of our organ music for four hands—a gay, brilliant piece which is full of action. Dear Handel. He often consoles me. Beethoven comes to my mind rarely, but when his music wakes up in me, it always makes such a deep impression on me that it is as though an unseen hand drew back the curtains and revealed Creation to me. Dear, grand old masters! Will it be thrown up in your faces that you are Germans? How can Schumann be associated with barbarians?

The aspect of the country hereabouts called to my mind yesterday what you played for me ten years ago from Wagner's "Rheingold"—"On Radiant Heights," etc.<sup>1</sup> But what our French opera has that is superior to the music of that composer is its substance, its limpidity, and its conscience. Yes, there is nothing turbid in the range of our French music. However beautiful Wagner's music may be, however incontestable and seductive his genius may be, still

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<sup>1</sup> Auf wonnigen Höh'n, in seligen Weben wiegt ihr euch.—  
"Das Rheingold." Dritte Scene.

I think that being deprived of hearing his music would not be so great a loss to French genius as if this happened to the grand classics of his fellow countrymen.

I can tell thee honestly that when the thought of possibly returning home safe and sound gets possession of me, never do I think of the trivial side—the many little comforts and pleasures that would then be mine again. This hope is based on something higher and nobler. May I even say it is something else than the great joy of our meeting again? It is rather the expectation of our taking up again our common effort, our united labor for the development of our soul, making it more useful than ever on this earth of ours.

*November 19. Morning.*

*Very dear Mama:* Today I was waked up at sunrise by a violent cannonading not common at this hour of the morning. At the same moment some of our soldiers came back chilled to the marrow by a night in the trenches. I got up to go and find some wood for them, when the firing began to be pretty strong on the opposite side of the valley. I went up as high as I could go until I saw in the very clear sky the

first signs of the break of day. Suddenly, from the hill in front of me, the one I like so much, came a great noise and shouts of "Forward!" "Forward!" It was a bayonet charge, the first I had seen, though in this instance I must confess I couldn't see much of it because the light was so bad and also probably because of the unfavorable lay of the ground. But what I heard sufficed to show that an attack was underway. Up to the present I have been able to figure to myself only a sort of anonymous warfare, which calls for a kind of courage very different from the valor which civilians generally associate with war. This morning's uproar also suggested another reflection. While I stood there in the calm of nature, young men without any personal motive of hate could and must throw themselves on other young men who stood waiting to kill them. In the meanwhile the sun had risen and lighted up the valley, and from my lofty position I could distinguish two villages, two ruins, one of which went up in flames recently, burning through three nights. Near me I also noticed two crosses in plain wood, marking the spot where French blood has been spilt.

*November 20.*

At this moment, from the window where I am writing thee, I see the sun coming up. It is piercing the frost on the beautiful earth, which tolerates such horrors as those now going on here. I learn that many were the victims of that bayonet charge which I heard rather than saw yesterday. Among others, we have no news of two sections of the regiment which forms with ours this brigade. Thus, while others were accomplishing their destiny, I was safe at the top of the most beautiful hill hereabouts, which I may add, however, is in ordinary moments very much exposed to the enemy's gunfire. I saw the sun rise, was filled with emotion at the sight of the peace of nature, and then felt as perhaps never before the great difference between the baseness of human violence and the majesty of the surrounding hills.

That painful period for thee which extended from September ninth to October thirteenth, corresponds exactly with the first phase of the war for me. On September ninth I arrived at the front, getting out of the train when the terrible battle of the Marne was underway some twenty miles from where we were. On the twelfth, I joined the One Hundred and Sixth

infantry and since then I have been with the fighters. As I wrote you on October thirteenth, we left the magnificent woods where the enemy's artillery and infantry did us much damage, especially on the third. Our little circle lost that day a heart of gold, a splendid fellow who had become too good to live. On the fourth, an excellent companion, a student of the school of architecture, was badly wounded in the arm. But he has since sent us good news of himself. So up to the thirteenth, that terrible day, we had some hard moments to pass through, which were made all the harder by a feeling of being smothered and not knowing what we were doing, shut up as we were in this wood, an admirable place to be in at any other time.

The most important conclusion to draw from all this is that we should keep ever in view the gravity of each passing moment. The problem is of a very peculiar kind. On the one hand is my providential good luck in not having been hurt so far; and yet it must not be forgotten that in the future I run all the risk that I have been running in the past. Hence it is that our desire to do the right thing should be especially confined to the present passing moment, which may be the last. No looking into the future



can bring us any real satisfaction, whereas I think every effort to improve the present counts. It is a heroic struggle that must be kept up and we can depend only on ourselves. We might also remember that there is another power much stronger than is any of our poor human strength.

*November 21.*

At present our daily life is so comfortable that it is almost too much so. The cold has kept us in the house of an excellent woman who takes care of us every time we come to this village, where we are cantoned three days out of every nine. I shall say nothing of the fine view from the window where I am writing to you, but I should say something of the inside of this house where a certain portion of our existence is passed. During the day we live in two rooms separated by a glass partition, so that from one room to the other we can admire the blazing fire and the big fireplace, or the magnificent wardrobe and the ancient brass bedsteads peculiar to the Meuse region. The ordinarily quiet life of two old ladies—a mother who is eighty-seven and her daughter—is rendered topsy-turvy by the rough and rude, but good-hearted and generous ways of our soldiers.



The two old ladies make no complaint, however, but on the contrary are really devoted to us.

As regards Spinoza, the essence of whose doctrine you have grasped, I think you can skip the rest to the last theorems. I feel sure that you will comprehend intuitively what he says about repose of soul. Yes, this repose of soul comes too rarely to us who are feeble; but it suffices for us to distinguish in ourselves, too often wholly absorbed with the knocks and the jolts of our poor humanity, a certain tendency towards permanent and final things, and then we recognize the admirable patrimony of the divine which is in us all.

Dear Mother, what a fine day I have passed with thee. We were three—we two and the grand view from my window. Winter, seen from here, presents a rather heavy and deadened image of things. Two clouds, or rather it is mist, envelop my neighboring hill and soften down the lines of the shrubs at the top. There is a dash of green in the sky. Everything is a little weakened in color and seems to sleep. And this is the very moment for the night attacks, the shouts of the charge, the vigils in the trenches. How we long each instant for the

end of all this. How we all wish we could have repose, full gratification of all our desires, and some compensation for all suffering, labor and separation from home and friends.

*Nine-thirty a. m., Sunday, November 22.*

From my favorite spot I write thee this morning, though nothing has happened since last evening which calls for remark, unless it be perhaps the thousand little changes in the landscape. I rose with the sun whose silvery light now fills the sky. The weather is still rather cold, but the supply of blankets gets the better of that when you pass the night in a cantonment. That is about all I have to say on what has happened; now a few words about what may happen or has just happened.

Tomorrow we go back to our second line trenches in the woods, which are now like skeletons and are rather monotonous. Of the three spots in which we stay that is perhaps the one I like the least, for the branches of the high trees cut off considerably the view of the sky. Also the landscape is flat, and the whole place is somewhat depressing on account of the course of life there.

Hostilities seem to be getting a little more

active in our region. For instance, this morning we heard a violent musketry firing, which is very uncommon in the present war, made up principally of night attacks, the day being almost wholly reserved for artillery bombardments.

Dear Mother, let us place our hope in the strength of soul which the hour, each minute, demand of us. Yes, it gives me pleasure to speak to thee of my daily life here, which in more ways than one is not so bad. Often at evening when I find myself alone out on the road where my trivial duties take me, I am so happy at being able to hold communion with noble nature, with the heavens and their harmonious starry patterns, with the ample and graceful curves of the hills; and, although even at such moments danger lurks around us, I feel that not only thy courage, thy belief in the eternal, but also thy love for me will approve of my not thinking always of what might happen.

Thus my present existence gives rise to some rather lofty sensations whose influence over me does not depend on their duration or persistency, as, for instance, beautiful foliage, a sunrise, a delicate landscape, a wonderful moon, in a word, everything in which ephemerality and perennity, at one and the same time, isolate

the human heart and turn it from all those preoccupations which in this crisis are apt to lead us either to a despairing disquietude or to an abject materialism, or again to an optimism which I would replace by a high-held hope which we both feel and which does not find its foundation in things human.

To dear grandmother I send my most tender and constant love, and trust that you both will be of good cheer, preserve your serenity, and be ready to accept whatever comes, and yet not give up all hope.

*November 23.*

*Dear Mother:* Here we are in our shelters in the second line of trenches. We are lodged in what I may call earth cabins, where the fire smokes us as much as it warms us. The weather, which was overcast during the night, offered us a fine pink and blue morning. But unfortunately these woods do not mean so much to me as the splendid, wide stretches of country which spread out in front of our first line. But everything in nature is beautiful in this region.

My day yesterday was made up of the pleasure of writing thee. At one moment I entered the village Catholic church, but I was not led

there by any sentimental feelings or desire for outside comfort. My conception of divine harmony doesn't need to be bolstered up by any formalism or popular symbolism. Then I had the grand satisfaction of going with a wagon out into the adjoining country on a little military errand. Oh! what a wonderful landscape there met my eyes—a savory color, the usual pink and blue attenuated by the mist, and all this luminous and sumptuous delicacy strengthened by the strong spots made by human figures scattered here and there over the scene. My favorite landscape, generally primitive in its precision, now took on a subtlety of shades and a varied richness which rendered it essentially modern. For a moment it brought back to me the more intellectual suburbs of Paris with their infinite notation and their definite registers, if I may employ a musical simile. But here there is more candor and more frankness in the scenery; everything was simply pink and blue on a fine gray ground. My driver, having some difficulty in managing the horse, handed me the switch that I might stir him up from time to time. I must have looked like some of those mechanical playthings, so stiffly did I perform my part. We passed several of those calvaries



which guard the villages of this region, peculiar because of the trees which encircle the cross.

*Three-thirty p. m., November 24. Back from a march.*

I have just received thy letter dated the sixteenth and the post card, and also thy dear letter of the eighteenth. The two last tell of the safe arrival of my package. How glad I am. For a moment I hesitated as to whether I ought to send thee those impressions. But between us life has ever been and can never be other than a perpetual investigation into the regions of eternal truths, a fervent study of them as presented by each terrestrial spectacle. So on the whole I do not regret having sent thee those little notes.

The first stay I made here was during those rainy days of September. None of us has forgotten them. We used to sleep all together in a heap, face against face, hands crossed, and buried in a deluge of rain and mud. You can not imagine our state of despair; and on top of it all came the announcement that the enemy was training machine-guns on us and we must prepare to attack him. In the meanwhile others



took our place and the joy over our deliverance was great indeed.

In regard to my little uncompleted poem, "Sun so Pale," it refers to the eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth of October, and in a general way to the period of the battle in the woods which lasted for our regiment from September twenty-second to October thirteenth. Some of the sun-rises which broke on the victims of those struggles made a deep impression on me, as the poem shows. Since then I have written nothing except a prayer which I sent thee five or six days ago. I wrote it on this road which we have just marched over.

*November 25. Morning.*

Yesterday during our march, I lived in a picture of my beloved primitives. Coming out of a wood and while we were going down a road, we were near a big castle in the midst of a farm, adorned with a grove of bare trees and a frozen pond. In the fore-shortened perspective, which my dear painters used so cleverly and naïvely, a road, unrolling its sinuosities, its risings and its descents, linked copses and isolated trees — all this clear, fine, as if engraved, and yet at the same time tender. A little bridge crossed

a brook; a trooper who passed over this little bridge was clearly outlined; then came a small wagon—all delicately balanced as regards discreet and well-sustained values, and the whole backed with a horizon of noble woods. A gray atmosphere, which drove from my mind the quite modern fairyland of shades of last Sunday, took me back to that incisive conscience which moves you in a Breughel<sup>1</sup> and the other masters whose names escape me. Such also was the orderly and limpid profusion of the backgrounds of Albert Dürer.<sup>2</sup>

*November 26.*

*Dearest Mother:* I didn't succeed in finishing this letter yesterday, as we had so much to do. Today it is still night as I write thee. From my cave—we have just come to the first line—I send thee deepest love and the expression of my supreme happiness. I feel my life work taking possession of me. What matter if Providence does not permit me to give it the light of day? I have a firm hope and a real confidence in eternal justice, whatever may be the surprise that this eternal justice sometimes causes in us

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<sup>1</sup> Jan Breughel (1567-1625), Flemish painter.

<sup>2</sup> German painter (1471-1528).

because of our preconceived human idea of what it should be.

*November 28.*

The place we now occupy is only some fifty yards from the enemy. The works of approach present a curious appearance, which is almost picturesque in its roughness, and looks all the more so in this gray weather. When, having baffled, largely thanks to the night, the vigilance of the enemy, our troops, coming up from the valley, get half-way up the hillside whose slopes protect us from infantry fire, they find shelters dug into the face of the hill, burrows where those not on duty can get rested and warmed by an improvised fireplace; and further on, at the point where the landscape becomes magnificent because of its broad extent and the full play of light, commences the twisting ditch or *boyau*, the communicating trench, in which you can move along out of sight until you reach the regular third line trench. The whole scene forms quite a warlike picture, severe and not without its grandeur, since this deep passageway has as its roof the gray sky, and its sides of earth are spread over with new-fallen snow. Here are infantry reserves, generally feeble in

numbers. At this point the enemy is only little over a hundred yards away. As this ditch advances it becomes more and more sinuous and deeper. When I go down into it, I always catch the odor of newly turned up earth, a fresh sap seeming to speak to me of the energies of this much-lacerated ground so like what happens in life. In these passages two or three sappers are constantly at work lengthening and deepening the ditch, closely watched by the Germans who are here and there able to strike at points which they find insufficiently protected. At the extremity of this ditch, some forty yards or more away, is stationed our last infantry soldier, in the first-line trench.

You can imagine the contrast between the consequences of these military activities and the peace accustomed to reign in this spot. Think how I am astonished when I recall that on a level with my eyes, as I stand in these trenches, the farmer used to guide his plough, and the same sun, which I long for as does a prisoner for his freedom, was shed on this farmer in abundance on these same heights. So when evening comes and I get back to the open surface of the ground, you can guess what my joy must be. But I should not speak to thee of these

things, for I still wish to say nothing of my pleasures; they must not be talked about. They are birds of silence. Let us speak only of the joys—this is the essential thing—that do not alarm us, as, for instance, the joy of knowing that we are prepared for whatever happens.

*November 29. Morning, in cantonment.*

*Very dear Mama:* Yesterday, in threatening weather, I left the first line, and during the night, after I got back here, it began to rain. From my favorite window I saw it coming on, first in the form of fog. If you like, I shall tell you of my fine views of yesterday. From the spot described in my yesterday's letter, one can see, as I have often written thee, the most wonderful horizon. Yesterday a terrific wind tore to pieces a veil of clouds which were hanging low and they got caught on the top of the hills. Perhaps the background of my H. picture may give you a feeble idea of what I saw. But how much more majestic and full of life was the emotion I felt when I saw the reality. These hills and valleys pass by turns from shadow to light, sometimes coming out very clearly and then again appearing somewhat veiled, depend-



ing on how much or how little the mist uncovers them. High up in the sky are big, blue holes fringed with light.

Such were some of the beauties of yesterday. What can I tell thee of the preceding evenings when the moon reflected on the roads the embroidery made by the bare branches of the trees, the pathetic outlines of the calvaries, and the shadows of houses which we know to be only heaps of ruins but which the obscurity of the night presents as if peace had built them up again?

I am glad you like Verlaine. Read the beautiful preface which Coppée has written for Verlaine's *Select Works*. You will find the book in my library. The fervor of it is very spontaneous. I might say it possesses an animality which always rather disconcerts me, largely because it is like that Catholic fervor whose figurative side always leaves me cold. But what a poet Verlaine is. In Paris he was one of my almost daily delights, and so it is here where often comes back to me the music of his *Paysages Tristes*, which sometimes move me to the very depths. Verlaine's life is as touching as that of some favorite diseased domestic animal, and you wonder that such unworthiness on his



part did not blast the exquisite flowers of his poetry. His conversion to Catholicism, the act rather of an artist than a thinker, was due to the upsetting of his whole existence because of some gross mistakes which landed him in prison. In *Le Lys Rouge*, under the name of Choulette, Anatole France has traced a living portrait of Verlaine. We may have the book at the house. What is admirable and edifying in the volume of poems, *Sagesse*, is the impulse, the strength of purpose and the touch of regret which run through it. The cry of the "Nuit de Mai" seems to echo there. In fact, our two greatest poetic temperaments of the last century, Musset and Verlaine, were two unfortunate souls who had no moral guardian to brace them up, but who blossomed forth with a magnificence which intoxicates us.

Perhaps I may tire thee in speaking of these uninteresting things—uninteresting at least under the circumstances. But meanderings of this sort take me back a little into my old life. Since I have had the happiness to receive thy letters, I have thought of little else. So don't think that these side matters make me forget what is nearest our heart and what our hope is. But at the same time I hold that all

that which is the ornament of life for both of us is the very thing which makes life worth living.

I have been expecting letters from thee ever since that of the twenty-second, and I feel sure that I shall get one between now and when we get back to the cantonment. Thanks for the package whose coming you announce. Poor mamas! How they do rack their brains to find what they can do for us.

*December 1. Morning. At the cantonment.*

I recall how glad I was when I was exempted from military service. It would have seemed to me then that, if at twenty-seven I was forced to return to the regiment, my life and career would be blasted. Yet here I am at twenty-eight plunged back again into military activity, far from my favorite occupations, and in spite of it all never has existence brought me such an abundance of noble emotions, never, perhaps, have I had such a keen sensibility for registering them, never such a strong conscience. So here we see benefits springing from what my apparently sensible human foresight regarded as a disaster, but which was in fact a blessing in disguise, and Providence, working in his own

good ways, frustrating all our timid short-sighted little plans.

The last two sunrises, that of yesterday and that of today, were admirable. By the way, I am half inclined to send thee a little sketch of the view from my window, though much of it is drawn from memory, for of course it varies from day to day. I want thee to see it as a whole. You must call on your imagination a little and see purples in most astonishing stripes, and limitless stretches of sky and earth to the left and right. This is what I have seen several times of late. But for the moment, a soft sky is in harmony with the orchards where we are at work on trenches. The little post which I am filling exempts me from handling the pickaxe, at least for the time being. Such are the pleasures which at a distance appear to be calamities.

*December 1. Second letter.*

I have just received thy letters of the twenty-fifth, twenty-sixth, and twenty-seventh, as also a dear letter from grandmother, who is so brave, so full of heart, and so clear in thought. Her letter has given me much pleasure and revives in me a loved hope which she believes will be fulfilled. I accept the happy augury with

joy. Each of thy letters, too, feeds me with what is dearest to me in life. My first letter today replies to what you say about accepting trials and destroying idols. You see I think just as you do on this point, and I hope that at present I haven't any very big idols encumbering my heart. I agree with thee that the last prayer which I sent thee is written in very simple language. I intended it to be so. The inspiration of the surroundings which produced it would not permit of any over-charged dress. God was everywhere and his creations were all harmonious. Thus, there was that night road which I often speak to thee of, the heavens full of stars, the valley whispering through its murmuring brook, the trees, the calvaries and the near-by and far-away hills. In such an atmosphere rhetoric has no place. It is useless for me to try and not be an artist and an honest one, and to serve truly my art, I must be conscientious about it. Hence the naturalness of this prayer; it simply reflects the environment where it was produced.

*December 5. Morning.*

We have come out of our burrows and, after three days of confinement, we see the sky again,

with the wide country before us. But Oh, how this poor region is slashed and cut up!

Your nice aluminum cup is admired by all the men. Is André's wound a bad one? What terrible anxieties the poor mamas have in this war. But be of good courage and nothing will be lost thereby. As for me, I am all right and in as good spirits as could be expected under the circumstances.

Today there is a high wind on, and fine big clouds are chasing one another across the sky. The air is full of life and even the branches of the trees feel it. During the past few nights we have had a splendid moon which was all the more appreciated because we had been shut up during the day. But, dearest, I am not writing well this morning because I am somewhat flurried by all this daylight after those long hours of darkness. But my heart ever turns to thee and I lean on thee for support. Let us be brave in everything. Let us have faith in God always and in spite of everything. I feel just as you do that we can adore him only in spirit, and like thee I think we should avoid showing any pride in our way of looking at this lest our manner might reflect on the beliefs which others hold. Let our love unite us to the Universal



Providence. Let us place our destiny in his hands in a spirit of constant prayer. Let us admit to him humbly that we cling to our human hope and try to associate with it, each instant, eternal wisdom. This is a hard task even in the course of ordinary life, and is made doubly so under present circumstances.

*Sunday, December 6.*

I am glad to see thee so firmly planted on the solid ground of courage. We need it, or rather we need something that is difficult to obtain—a thing which is neither patience nor over-confidence, but rather faith in the fixed order of things, the power to say with each new trial as it comes, “Well, it is good that it is so.” Our natural instinct tends to push us towards trying to escape present obligations when they are too hard to bear or are too often thrust upon us. But I am so happy to learn that you have fully grasped what Spinoza meant by human liberty—an inaccessible ideal which one must strive to attain, nevertheless. Dear Mother, the trials we must undergo are long, but it cannot be said that they are monotonous, since, in spite of their sameness, they demand a courage which must be continually renewed.



Therefore, let us unite our efforts and pray God to grant us the strength and the means to enable us to accept whatever may happen. You know what I call religion. It is that which links man with all his conceptions of the universal and the eternal—those two forms of God. Religion, in the ordinary sense of the word, is only the link which unites certain moral and disciplinary formulas which are associated with an admirably poetic figuration, that is, the external form and shape which are given to the vigorous philosophy of the Bible and Christianity. But don't let us wound anybody's feelings while we hold to our own beliefs, for when carefully examined, these religious formulas, however foreign they may be to my own intellectual assumptions, seem to me praiseworthy and deserving of our sympathy for what they contain of aspirations toward beauty and esthetic form. Dear Mother whom I love, hope ever. The trials may be many but everything that is beautiful rests. Let us pray that we may contemplate, for a long time still, all that is noble around us.

*Monday, December 7.*

*Very dear beloved Mother:* I write thee in the dark, and though it be only six A. M., military

life is in full swing. My candle is stuck in a bayonet, and from time to time I receive on the end of my nose a drop of water, while my poor companions are trying to put some flame into a rebellious fire. The stay in the trenches converts us into a mass of mud. But it is wonderful what good spirits prevail here. However eager all these men are to get home, they nevertheless accept very heroically the vicissitudes of our present calling. Though their courage may have much less of the literary flavor than mine, it is all the more practical for this very reason and far better adapted to all that comes. Every bird has his own cry, but I fear there is very little of the war cry in this one. I am happy, however, to find that I have been able to meet every shock in the right spirit, and I base much of my hope on the thought that these shocks have forged a soul in me. So I have confidence in what God reserves for me.

I think I see the work laid out for me, but I do not wish to indulge in any predictions based on this presentment, for every artist carries in him conceptions which never see light. Mozart, when he thought he was about to make a new flight, died, and Beethoven had planned a tenth symphony without knowing his end was so near.

It is the artist's duty to bud regardless of the frost which may be close at hand. It is possible that God will permit some of my efforts to fructuate in the future. Though there is a marked homogeneity about my work, still my sketches and attempts at art have a youthful touch about them; there is a stammering in their execution which jars with the real loftiness of the intention. I feel that the art which is in me will not blow until I reach maturity. May God permit me to wait so long. This is my prayer.

As regards thy heart, I have such confidence in thy courage that it is a great source of comfort to me. I know this mother of mine has attained the freedom of soul which makes it possible for one to contemplate the universal drama. From my own experience, I am aware how intermittent is this wisdom. But one has God in him when you have a suspicion that you have. Thy soul and thy love give me that peace of mind which makes it possible for me to look into the future whatever form it assumes.

*December 9.*

*Dear Mother:* P. L. tells me in his charming letter that he would willingly exchange his philosophy for a gun. But he is all wrong in this.

In the first place, Spinoza, who bores him, is a precious help to one in the trenches; again, it is necessary that those who are in a position to profit by every kind of culture and intellectual development, help in preserving French genius for the end of the war. They have a very great part to play where so much more initiative can be exercised than here at the front, where, though it is true we are freed from a certain kind of restraint, our existence, I should say, is much like that of the early monks—a rude, regular discipline but without any external obligations.

*December 10. A wonderful morning.*

This third day in cantonment brings with it the pleasure of better weather. The exasperating downpour of our last sojourn in the first line is holding up a bit and now the sun is beginning to come out timidly.

The rather quiet existence which we have been leading for the past two months must of course come to an end sometime. This trench warfare seems to threaten an endless contest, and it looks as if there was nothing left but for one side or the other to begin an offensive that will precipitate events. I think something of this

sort is under consideration at grand headquarters, and as far as I am concerned, I can assure thee that I would welcome any change that would bring with it fresh occasions for new experiences. One-third of our present existence is, if one tells the truth, little else than commonplace humdrum, and the other two-thirds offers about as much danger as would be incurred at a chemical manufactory. If things go on this way, it will end by numbing whatever sensibility we have left. Of course we'll not like the idea of a change when the moment comes to make it, because we have got used to an easy-going life which, however, can't last. Perhaps, by the way, there is going to be a little change, too, in my own situation. It is probable that I may not be able to take that trip I wrote you about, as there is some talk of making me a corporal, which, if done, would keep me pretty continuously employed in the first-line trenches. I trust God will be with me in these new duties as he has been in the past. I feel that we have nothing else to ask for. If there is in us something eternal which we have still to make manifest on this earth, we may feel sure that God will leave us here until that is done.



*December 10. Second letter.*

Happily for us, there is a common ground on which we stand united; and we haven't to put it in writing every time.

The weather is getting cloudy again and we may have a wet time during our next stay in the first and second lines. As I write, night is coming on and a deep melancholy is spreading over everything. It is a sad hour for those far away, for all the soldier hearts which are thinking of home and who see night spreading over the earth. At such moments, I turn towards thee and forthwith my heart grows warmer, for I feel descending upon me thy attentive tenderness and the same wisdom which inspires thy courage. Sometimes I hesitate to go on repeating to thee the same old things, but how can I find new words in which to express my poor love, tossed about as I am in this never changing hurly-burly? As we are going to leave these quarters, we shall abandon many pleasant memories which have become very dear to us. But then the soul should not get too strongly attached to mere fetiches. The heart may sometimes find comfort in material things, but our love—thine and mine—can live on without amulets.



*Ten a. m., December 12.*

Fine day, though raining. All goes well in our melancholy woods. In this neighborhood a terrible cannonading is being indulged in by both sides. Thy letters of the fourth and the sixth received. They've made me happy. They're the real joy of my life. I'm glad you had a nice visit at G. I hope soon to write thee more at length. I could do it now as far as leisure goes, but I don't feel quite up to it. I'm in a mood where beautiful things do not appeal to me as usual. But I am ever longing for true wisdom.

*Seven p. m., December 12.*

Today, notwithstanding the changing beauty of sun and rain, these natural sights did not make the usual impression on me, and yet never was there so much grace and goodness in the sky. The landscape, with the little bridge and embankment, about which I have often written thee, was softened down under the splendor of the clouds. But I did not enjoy this kindness of God in the way I generally do, as when a fine tree suddenly touches me to the heart. Then it would mean to me an ever-smiling beauty. The green of the ivy, the red tinge of

autumn, the decided touch of winter in the branches—an instant of such a scene is generally a whole life to me, even the price of existence, in comparison with which every human expectation is as a poor, empty dream.

*Sunday, December 13.*

Today, after a refreshing night, I took a walk in the woods where three months ago the dead covered the ground. Declining autumn displayed its riches, and the beauty of the moss-covered trunks spoke to me this morning as yesterday of eternal serenity. Doubtless a great effort is necessary in order to perceive how little the general harmony of nature is troubled by the sights which are now distracting our emotions. We are made to feel that any disturbance of nature's laws is really of little consequence, and that what is truly a part of us are the aspirations of the heart.

*December 14. Splendid weather with a return to calm days.*

Here we are still in the first-line area of operations, but in a spot where you can lift up your head and drink in the charm of my Meuse hills, which this gentle weather has rendered serene

once more. I perceive above the village and orchards the rows of birches and firs, the leafless branches of the first tinged with a transparent violet and streaked with white, while the second, with their dark shades of green, give a stronger color to the horizon.

During a recent march, the courage that is in me was greatly strengthened by a grand lesson taught me by a fine tree. Ah! dear Mother, the whole of us may disappear and yet nature will go right on just the same and be as splendid as ever; and the gift of herself which now and then she makes me for an instant suffices to justify my whole existence. That tree was like a soldier!

You cannot imagine how the forests have suffered in this region, due, however, not so much to machine-guns as to the terrible cutting down of trees for the making of our shelters and for warming purposes. But even this destruction shows me that there is beauty here in tree and man alike; that is to say, man at this moment teaches a fine lesson, too, though it may not be so easily perceived, perhaps—the magnificent vitality of this youth of France whose expansive energies will not be checked by this holocaust, I feel sure.

*December 15. Morning.*

*Dear beloved Mother:* I have received thy dear letter of the ninth, in which you speak of our inner feelings. I am so happy when I realize how fine is the force in us which holds us to life. You may separate us, you may shatter our dearest hopes, but this determination to live on remains fixed in our breasts as firmly as ever. It makes me happy, too, to know that my letters find an echo in thy heart. Sometimes I fear I am boring thee with my descriptions of our daily existence here, which, though admirable in many respects, is very primitive and doesn't present many striking sides. If I could only set myself to painting, I would find right here at hand the finest materials for the canvas and inexhaustible sources of artistic inspiration that can be imagined. But when I try to *write* about the sky, trees, hills, and the horizon, I quickly find that I can't handle words as I would my brush; and so the endless variety of things which I see are apt to become mere repetitions when I strive to set them down in writing.

*December 15. Later.*

One has to adapt oneself to this special existence in which I move. It may be poor in

intellectual activities but it is wonderfully rich in those things which awaken the emotions. I can now understand why in the old, troubled times, centuries ago, men weary of the dainties of life sought in the peace of the cloister that opportunity to contemplate things eternal, a contemplation often interrupted by threatening hordes, it may be, but a refuge all the same. It seems to me that our life here in the trenches resembles in many ways that of those ancient monks whose existence had much that was military about it and who were often more fitted to fight than I am. Among them, too, were sensitive natures who tasted the joys that I also experience.

It is impossible to say more than we have said concerning the attitude we should assume under present circumstances. What we now have to do is to put into practice the conclusions we have arrived at. But this is more easily said than done, as I have discovered during these last few days, though, let me add, no new temptation has arisen to check my efforts in the ways of wisdom. In fact, when now and then I worry a little on this score, I ask myself if it may not be due to my being over-conscientious.



The weather is changeable, but for that very reason it stirs one's emotional nature.

*December 16.*

When in our shelter yesterday, I took out of my pocket your little sketch book now so worn, alas! and tried to make a little picture of the landscape. But the weather was too cold and I shut up the book in disgust, when the thought occurred to me to ask one of the men to pose. I can't tell thee what joy my success gave me. I don't think the crayon was too bad. It has been sent off in a letter to some girl friend or other of the soldier who posed. I can't tell thee what real pleasure I got out of the fact that I saw I had not lost all my art.

*December 17. In a new cantonment.*

We have been torn from our customary surroundings. Last night when we left the first-line trenches after three days of complete calm, we were ordered to the same cantonment where we spent October sixth and seventh. I feel in the air that a change is coming. But today's serene weather augurs well for whatever may happen. During the past few days there have been fine views which I appreciate more than I



did during those few days of weakness, due to my having allowed myself to worry my soul over wretched little human interests. I write thee from a window whence I watch the sun going down. You see, we are always treated with kindness.

*Three p. m.*—I continue this letter in the twilight of an exceptional winter. The day is going to sleep as placidly as it awoke. I am watching the washerwomen on the bank under a row of trees busy over their linen in the river. Peace reigns everywhere, even in our hearts, I think. Night is falling.

*December 19. In cantonment.*

A quiet day ending around the table—drawing, music. I am reflecting in calmness on the length of the days to come, recalling how rapidly have passed those which have gone. We have now crossed the half-way mark of this month and the Christmas holidays are near, for they come even at the front. My only thought now is to adapt myself fully to our present state of existence, and then attain, thanks to our spiritual union, that condition of resignation and submission which is of a higher order than human courage.

*December 21. Morning.*

*Very dear Mother:* I speak freely in my letters of my joys; but the rock on which earthly happiness is generally wrecked is this one—our poor humanity is always in fear lest we lose our happiness, quite forgetful of the fact, which experience is ever teaching us, however, that the eternal law always gives us a new joy for the one we have lost. As for myself, I haven't to look for a new one. My task seems to be that of always trying to conciliate the two sorts of wisdom—the human one which urges me to cultivate my good fortune, and the other which teaches me that this human happiness is but a fleeting show. We might conclude, therefore, that the best line to follow would be to make the most of those human pleasures which a strict conscience had chosen, and at the same time not forget the ephemeral nature of them all.

Yes, you are right in saying that the scriptures contain the most beautiful and poetical philosophy. I think they owe it to their affiliation with the old philosophies. Many things in the writings of Edouard Schuré<sup>1</sup> are open to

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<sup>1</sup> Edouard Schuré, born in 1842, French miscellaneous writer, author of "Les Grands Initiés," a rather rationalistic history of the various religions—the book referred to in the text.

question, but what we should hold fast to is the divination which carries him back, through the intricacies of every doctrine, to the far-distant source of all human wisdom. I suppose you know that those very tender myths of the Good Shepherd and the Virgin Mary, which are so cleverly utilized by our Christian Church, are ancient creations of the human fondness for symbols. The Greeks received them from their spiritual ancestors and called the Good Shepherd, Hermes, the conductor of souls to Hades, the psychopomp. In the same way, the maternity of our Madonna is the Greek divinity, the grand Demeter, the mother, who is represented holding an infant in her arms. You get the impression that all religions, as they succeed one another, hand down the same stock of symbols, to which our ever young and poetic humanity gives new life each time.

*December 23. In the dark.*

What irony! I began this letter yesterday but was interrupted. Then the weather was splendid and in fact has changed very little since. But we are back in the first-line zone, this time in the village itself—the nice Corot which I described two months ago. But our

advanced post is now in a house every aperture of which we have to keep closed so as not to be discovered by the enemy. We are in a room where, though it is now nine in the morning, it is so dark that you might think it was Christmas eve.

Thy recent letter has made me very happy. It is true, as you say, that Grace and Inspiration are two terms for the same thing. If you go to the gallery of Gustave Moreau,<sup>1</sup> you will see a panel called "The Life of Humanity," which is divided into nine compartments forming three series of paintings called "The Golden Age," "The Silver Age," and "The Iron Age." Above them is a pediment where Christ is represented presiding over this human scene. This grand genius, Moreau, had the same intuition which you have had—to each of these three series is given the name of a hero: Adam, Orpheus, and Cain, and to each of them is assigned three Hours. The Hours of the Golden Age are Ecstasy, Prayer, and Sleep; those of the Silver Age, Inspiration, Song, and Tears. Ecstasy is also Pardon, for the painter represents Adam and Eve in the purity of their soul,

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<sup>1</sup> French painter (1826-98), whose remarkable collection is in the Rue de La Rochefoucauld, Paris.

in the midst of a beautiful vegetation and enjoying divine contemplation. A harmonious nature surrounds them and aids them in their reaching after God. Inspiration in its Silver Age is also Pardon, which, however, is already beginning to get entangled in human guile. The poet Orpheus always sees God, associates with the Muse, and the symbol of human art is born, while the human manifestation of God, Song, is followed by tears and suffering. Continuing the cycle and attaining human pollution, Gustave Moreau depicts the Iron Age—Cain condemned to labor and crime. This pictorial work means that we may seize the divine instant, that is to say, man can be associated with God; but the moment is fugitive, and this cannot be our ordinary existence. It excuses our weaknesses. Some will say that the conception of this painting is too literary, not spiritual enough. But it touches the soul of those who strive to pierce the cold which chills all human expression.

It may be true that Rembrandt was the poet of genius *par excellence* and at the same time a pure painter. But let us admit that our epoch presents less richness and less universality of temperament; and let us recognize the beauty



of Gustave Moreau's poem whose spirit, in a word, you have divined.

THY SON.

*December 24. Morning.*

Our first day in the outposts was one of bucolic calmness, with a feeling of snow in the atmosphere; and sure enough it came during the night. From the back garden of this house, hidden from the view of the Germans, I could take a good look at the snow, which rounds off every little thing under it and throws a pure white blanket over all. When I was satisfied with the scene, I came back to our candle-lighted abode, where I am now writing thee on one corner of a table, on another corner of which a soldier is grating chocolate. This is the way things go at the front. Military life, indeed, sometimes reveals rather amusing surprises. For instance, we are back here in the first line again simply because two of our officers could here find a tub in which they can take a bath. But in these matters I am satisfied with the empty shell of a "seventy-five," which serves me as a water-pitcher.

I say nothing to thee in this letter about patience, because it may be that a very large stock



of it is unnecessary when we do not know what is coming next. And again, the days pass so rapidly; they are in fact like those of children—gone before one knows it. In truth, we are but children when compared with the events of which we form a part. Indeed, one of the benefits of this war will be to put a young heart into those of us who get back alive.

Dear Mother, our village has again received the visit of two shells, and we are asking ourselves whether they will be followed by others. May God take us under his protection. The other day the Germans sent us one hundred and fifteen of these shells and all they did was to wound one man in the wrist. By the way, a house in which a part of our company is installed is now on fire; but I don't see anybody stirring. I do hope all is going well with our fellows over there.

I am so glad to have had the experiences of these past few months, which have shown me what one can do with one's life however it may present itself. My companions offer fine specimens of French character. They like to fool a little, but their fooling is only the surface of a deep, underlying courage. My chief fault,

due mainly to my artistic tastes, is trying to dress up the soul of our race in a fine robe painted in the colors I like. So when these fellows bother me, I think they are dirtying this robe which I have put on them. Of course this robe would decidedly hamper them when called upon to do their duty in the splendid way they have.

### *Christmas Morning.*

What a unique, never to be forgotten night we have just passed, where beauty triumphed and where humanity, in spite of its present bloody infatuation, showed that it really has a conscience. Think of it, that in the midst of intermittent fusillades, there was singing all along the whole line. On our front, a fine tenor voice sang the enemy's Christmas hymn, while much further along, behind the intrenchments where our lines begin again, you could hear the words of the "Marseillaise," as an answer. The night was rich in stars and meteors, and hymns after hymns were heard everywhere. It was the eternal aspiration after harmony, an indomitable demand for the beauty and concord of order. I found a pleasure of my own in calling to mind the suavities of Berlioz's *The*

*Childhood of Christ*.<sup>1</sup> The freshness and juvenile spirit of this French music appealed to me. I recalled the celebrated *Pilgrims' Sleep* and *The Shepherds' Chorus*. A verse which the Virgin sings — "The Lord, for my son's sake, has blessed this asylum" — made every nerve in me vibrate, and the melody has kept ringing in my ears all the time I have been sitting in this little house where I am now writing thee, whose neighbor, by the way, is all in flames, as I have told thee, and whose own fate is quite as uncertain. But these dangers did not kill the music that is in me; and then I thought of all the joys accorded me, and fancied that perhaps at this very same hour you were praying for a benediction on my retreat; and the beauty of the sky seemed a favorable omen; and finally welled up in me the desire to be blessed each instant with such wisdom that however human this wisdom might be, it would shield me from any and every surprise. Such were some of the thoughts and aspirations of that memorable night.

Now a superb sun is inundating the whole

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<sup>1</sup> Berlioz's "L'Enfance du Christ," sacred oratorio in three parts. "Le Sommeil des Pèlerins" and "Le Chœur des Bergers" are parts of this oratorio.

country hereabouts, while I am writing thee by candle light; and every now and then I go into the back garden to look at it. Everywhere is a brightness which seems to spread over the deserted region a divine calm from above. I have just come back to my room, where in the dim glimmer flickers the brass of the fine Meuse bedsteads—I have written thee more than once about these things—and the highly polished carved wood of the equally fine wardrobes, all of which, I may say in passing, are suffering from the rough treatment of the soldiers. But how much comfort we get out of them! And in addition we have found knives and forks and kitchen utensils, etc., so that for two days we have been serving our chocolate in a soup tureen. What style!

Oh! dear Mother, if God grants me the joy of returning to thee, how young this extraordinary experience will have made me. As I wrote my friend P., I am living like a child in the midst of such plain people; and yet my own existence, though everything about it is really very rudimentary, appears complicated in the eyes of those around me.

Dearest Mother, the length of this war is an excellent exercise for the passive faculties of

our will. But I feel that all is coming around in the way I seem to have been permitted to foresee it. I think these long intervals of inactivity are giving our intellectual machinery a good rest. If I have the good luck to be called upon to use it again, some little time may be required to get it started once more; but what fresh strength it will have attained. My last art work before the war was pure thought, wholly intellectual; and my chief ambition, perfectly natural under the circumstances, was simply to give plastic form to this thought as it developed. But there is something more than that in me now.

*Nine a. m., Sunday, December 27. Fifth day  
in the first line.*

It appears that the terrible position held bravely by us on October fourteenth, and lost immediately afterwards by our successors, has been retaken along a distance of more than two hundred yards, but at the cost of one hundred men *hors de combat*.

Dear Mother, the lack of sleep makes me stupid. Though one doesn't need to have much intelligence for our every-day kind of existence, when I come to thee, I always wish to be inter-



esting. I find much consolation in the thought that our mutual affection is so strong that we haven't to dwell on it in order to keep it alive. But there is really little news to send thee. Spending yesterday all in the dark got terribly on my nerves. I am still all worn out by it; and yet from my post I could see a tree against the sky. But of course one tree doesn't make a landscape any more than one swallow makes a spring. But as if by way of compensation for yesterday's dreariness, this morning broke charmingly. I was especially struck by an exceedingly bright star. I went out to get some coal and water, and on my way back I noticed that, though the daylight was much stronger than when I started, this star was still shining in an extraordinary manner. My corporal, who was with me, said to me as we slunk from one clump of trees to another, so as not to get struck by a stray German bullet, on our way back to the house: "Do you know what that star means? Well, I do. It is simply the rallying sign of the enemy's patrol, and is no star at all!" This was quite true, and at first I was provoked at this profanation of the heavens; but on second thought, I said to myself that this is not merely a very clever trick, for it tells the poor fellows



on the other side in what direction their safety lies. So then I didn't think so hard of them or of it, and as it had given me so much joy, I decided to remember it only in that connection.

*December 30.*

I received this evening thy Christmas letter, and probably now, while I am writing thee, mine of the same day is in thy hands. Then, notwithstanding the risk, I was enjoying the beauty around me; but today I must confess all is embittered for me by the bad news which has come to us concerning the latest butchery. During the whole of the twenty-sixth, we were kept in our fighting positions, which under ordinary circumstances are occupied only during the night. We stood there on the defensive and were very lucky even though exposed to artillery fire, for on our right a regiment of our division holding one of the positions of October fourteenth, was given a fearful task to perform and, though the result was negative, it cost several hundred lives. So our big village, where our good hostess, like ourselves, knew the victims, is plunged into sadness.

*December 30. Second letter.*

The soul is placed above and beyond all attack. Of course, one's anguish may be very great, and this may be especially the case with one's anxiety. But the soul stands firm against all these. Things that may, perhaps, happen in the future fade before what is really going on at the present moment. It is a sort of version of the old saying that a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush. Then, look at the more material side of the problem. The weather is kindly and nature is indifferent to all that we are doing. The dead will not stop the coming of spring. Again, when the shock of the momentary horror is passed, and memory of the killed takes the place of their living presence, you find yourself getting a certain kind of comfort in thinking of what really exists instead of thinking of what is gone forever. It is in these very lugubrious woods about me here that one perceives the emptiness of the sepulcher and of funeral rites. The soul of these poor brave fellows doesn't need these things.

*Four o'clock.*—I have just finished the fourth portrait, that of a lieutenant of my company, and I am pleased with it. But the shades of night are falling. I send thee my love, and

my love is a brave love. Hope and wisdom be ours.

*January 3, 1915.*

Yesterday, when I had finished my tasks of the manual-labor sort and felt my usual satisfaction at having done so, I then fell to contemplating the little bits of tape on my coat sleeve.<sup>1</sup> At first I felt rather humiliated at the sight, for, until I got them, I was a simple nobody doing my little part without playing any military rôle. But now I have been given a rank down at the very bottom of a hierarchy. Before, I was anonymous, but now I am an inferior somebody. Now, every time I look at this tape, I am reminded that I have certain duties which the social body expects me to perform; I, who am so often lost in my own individuality. I used to be free to cultivate my soul in my own little way and my whole duty consisted in asking this soul to make me worthy of my efforts. But I am free no longer.

*January 4. Posted January 7. In a mine-shaft.*

I write thee at the entrance to a subterraneous passage, a mine-shaft which is being driven

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<sup>1</sup> The author had been promoted to a corporalship.

underneath the enemy's position. The duty of our little post is to see that nothing happens to the sapping engineers who are digging away, propping up the earth roof over their heads and consolidating generally the excavation which has already been driven forward more than a dozen yards. To get to our station, we have to wade through mud up to our thighs. But during the night hours we are here, we are pretty safe as we are protected by several yards' thickness of earth. I have under me six privates, and we lead a sleepless existence, accompanied with many privations, for three days at a time. This is the way I am celebrating the assumption of my new military honors. But I am happy, on the whole, to experience once more the old trials. It may be that I will be given the grade which I am now filling *ad interim*. I will have rightly gained the distinction! The weather, I should add, is simply atrocious, and, to make matters worse, if this is possible, I burnt, by accident, a perfectly new pair of boots, and now here I am—but, then, I am in the same boat with the others—weltering in the mud and wet. But I am happy to be able to report that my health remains good. But, dearest, I must now be off to get a little sleep.

*January 6. Evening.*

*Dear Mother:* Here we are back in our cantonment after seventy-two hours without sleep and in an awful slough of rain and slop. I have had several letters from thee, dear beloved Mother. The last one was dated the first of the month. How I love them. But in order to speak to thee of all this as I would, I must first go and sleep a little.

*January 7. Toward noon.*

This fragmentary letter is now being finished at the guard-house, where my section is on duty. The weather continues very bad. You cannot imagine how this upsets our whole existence. We are simply living in water, and the walls are covered with mud, as are the floor and ceiling, too.

*January 9.*

Many of the things that console me have been wanting these past few days on account of this shockingly bad weather. The terrible mess in which we live prevents one from seeing anything; no nature distractions for me now. So I close with an ardent appeal for comfort from our love and with a feeling of certitude in a jus-

tice higher than ours. Dear Mother, in the matter of sending me things, I really need nothing. What I lack is quite a different thing from what can be sent by express. But we must ever be of good courage. If we were only certain that this moral effort would produce its fruits!

When you think of me, I wish you would place me in that category of persons who have gone away and left all behind them—friends, family, and their social circle—to whose relatives they are only a memory, and who speak of them in this wise: “We have a brother who, many years ago, went from home, and we don’t know what has become of him.” Then, when I feel that you, too, have abandoned, as far as concerns me, all human form of attachment, I shall move more freely in this life, knowing that I am bound by none of the ordinary ties of relationship.

I do not regret my new situation, for though this corporalship carries with it many new trials and experiences, it also brings with it some amelioration of my material condition. So more than ever I wish to live for the passing moment alone, and that I would find easier to do if I felt that you accept the idea that the life I am now leading is not at all transitory.



I cannot tell thee how much I enjoyed the copies of the *Revue Hebdomadaire* which you sent me. I was especially delighted with the extracts from the speeches of Lamartine. Circumstances led him, the poet, to give but little attention to his art. He was plunged into public life and his great soul had to take up tasks which were more immediate and heavier than were suitable to his genius.

*Twelve thirty p. m., January 12. In the new cantonment.*

I don't see any issues from the present situation. My own conscience is now my only judge of what is right or wrong. We must confide in an impersonal justice which is independent of all human influence, and have faith in useful and harmonious destiny notwithstanding the horrible form which it seems to assume at the present moment.

*January 17. In cantonment.*

What shall I say to thee this odd January afternoon where snow is followed by thunder? Our present cantonment furnishes us pleasant things which I fully appreciate. I am especially moved by the enrapturing poetry with which

we are now surrounded. Imagine a little lake in a private park, where is a castle or, rather, a spacious country house sheltered by high hills. We are lodged in the servants' hall. But I don't need rich canopies or modern comforts to complete this undreamed-of existence, which has been ours for the past three days. Last evening we had the good luck to have some singers to cheer us up. Of course, this was not exactly the kind of music I like, but what these sentimental popular songs lacked in art was made up for by the ardor and earnestness which the performer put into them. The workman who gave us these songs, which were decent, even moral—though the morality was a little sophisticated, yet, nevertheless, there was a morality—this workman put so much feeling into his voice that he quite moved our hostesses. Such is the popular ideal, an ideal, however, which does not really exist, which is purely negative, but which months of suffering made me feel indulgent for.

I have just learned that Péguy<sup>1</sup> was killed at the beginning of the war. What a destruction there will be of intellectual France! We can-

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Péguy (1873-1914), French poet and miscellaneous writer, killed on the eve of the battle of the Marne.

not understand, though I suppose it is quite natural, how civilians at home can continue their normal existence while we at the front are in this tempest. I saw in a copy of the *Cri de Paris*, which I stumbled on the other day, the program of concerts at Paris. What an anti-thesis! But, dear Mother, the essential thing is that we should know beauty in some instances of grace. Nothing these days speaks of individual hope but of general certainties.

The weather is perfectly awful, though you do feel spring in the air.

*January 19.*

Since yesterday we have been in our second-line positions. We came here in a weather remarkable for snow and freezing. The sky, pink in color and beautiful in its fury, hung phantom-like over the forest buried in snow—the trees having a limpid blue tint at their base and their tops like brown lace against the heavens, while the earth below was one great sheet of white snow.

I have received two packages, in one of which was *La Chanson de Roland*, which has given me great pleasure. I especially liked the introduction treating of this national epopee and

speaking of the *Mahabharata*, which, it appears, tells of the combats between the spirits of Good and Evil, a very timely subject at this moment.

I am made very happy, too, by thy admirable letters. As regards our sufferings here on earth I think they are not so unbearable as you seem to imagine. But what we must all admit and not be ashamed to admit is that we are *bourgeois*, that is, a common-place sort of people. We have tasted the honey of civilization, perhaps a poisoned honey, though I am not so sure about that, for there is certainly harmony in this sweetness. Nor should our ordinary existence be a preparation for violence, however much this violence may be salutary, and in the midst of all this, we should not lose sight of the order discovered in the calm. Order leads to eternal repose. Violence puts movement into life. We have as objectives eternal order and eternal repose; but, without violence which lets free the reserve of utilizable energy, we would be inclined to consider that order had been attained — an anticipated order which would be in fact only a lethargy retarding the coming of final order. Our sufferings spring simply from the deception which we experience by the delay in

the coming of this true order; human patience cannot endure the waiting necessary for its coming. But, though we suffer, we prefer not to be agents of violence. It is much as when molten matter solidifies too quickly and so takes on a bad shape and has to be put in the fire again and remelted. This is just the way violence acts in the problems of human evolution. But this useful violence should not cause us to overlook what our esthetic common-placeness, or *bourgeoisisme*, had acquired of lasting order in peace and harmony. Our suffering comes precisely from the fact that we do not forget it.

*January 20. Morning.*

Please don't imagine that I do not get enough sleep, though I must admit that in this matter there is not much regularity, for at one moment we sleep very comfortably for three days and three nights in succession, and then the next moment the contrary is true.

Now nature is coming to my support again; that terrible period of rain, rain, rain, has given place to some fine cold days; we are having good freezing weather, and are now walking on solid ground once more. No mud. My modest non-commissioned grade lets me have some time

to myself, and though I don't take any longer those fine night tramps, I haven't to perform any more of that day drudgery; so I have time to look around and enjoy things a bit. Yesterday, for instance, we had a sunset that I shall not soon forget. There was a sort of spumishness about the atmosphere, with delicate tints of light shot through it, while the surface of the ground reflected the blue coldness of the snow. Dear Mama, it was one of those evenings that made me homesick. These old familiar lines came back to me in the stillness:

Mon enfant, ma sœur,  
Songe à la douceur  
D'aller là-bas vivre ensemble!  
Aimer à loisir,  
Aimer et mourir  
Au pays qui te ressemble!<sup>1</sup>

Yes, Baudelaire's *L'Invitation au Voyage* was floating in that exquisite sky. Ah! how far I

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<sup>1</sup> From the volume of "Les Fleurs du Mal," by Charles Baudelaire (1821-67), the French poet. The verses given in the text might be translated as follows:

My child, ah! my sweetheart,  
Think of the blissful part  
Of dwelling far away there together!  
Leisurely loving,  
Loving and dying  
In that land which is like thee forever.



was then from all this war! But when I got back to earthly things, I was nearly too late for dinner!

*January 20. Evening.*

Ever resignation — adapting ourselves to life which is always moving on and which cares little for our petty needs.

*January 21.*

Here we are in our first-line positions. Snow followed us here, but also a thaw. Fortunately, however, our present condition is very different from the terrible sojourn in the flooded trenches.

Who can describe the loveliness of trees in winter? Have I ever called thy attention to what Anatole France says of them in his *Le Mannequin d'Osier*? He prefers their delicate skeletons and intimate beauty as revealed to the view by winter. I am also enamored of this wonderful example of counterpoint with the thousand combinations of branches reflected against the sky.

From my present billet I can see our village, which suffers every day more and more from

shell fire, until it has become gradually little else than a mass of ruins crumbling into dust. The church is also badly damaged, but the charm of its jagged outline continues all the same; and then it is so prettily ensconced between those two finely chiseled hills.

We had a good time during our last stay in the second line. This snowy weather was really beautiful and clement, too. In my yesterday's letter I spoke to thee of the fine sunsets of the other days, and, earlier, of our coming into these wonderful woods.

*January 22.*

I have sent thee some verses, but I don't know if they are any good. However, the writing of them helped to reconcile me to our present prosaic existence; and our last cantonment was really so beautiful that making verses in such a spot was excusable. There were rivulets babbling over the pebbles, big, limpid ponds in the park, slumbering pools, alleys that set you to dreaming; and none of these lovely things has been polluted by this brutal conflict. Unfortunately, I am given to understand that we shall not return to that beauteous place. It is evident that something is in the wind, and

that the regularity of our winter quarters existence is coming to an end.

Today the sun has set the snow a-sparkling and its charm is simply captivating. But we have had some bad days, days when there was nothing but nasty mud.

*Two p. m.* — The fine weather continues and shows that spring is coming. Fortunately, we can enjoy it, for our present positions are more sheltered, so that we can look out and around a bit. But I don't feel in a writing mood today and can only send thee my love. This war is long, and I cannot even speak of patience in connection with it, much less practice patience. My happiness has been in being able to tell thee often during these past five and a half months that everything is not ugliness.

*January 23.*

As for myself, I have no longer any desires. When the trials are really hard, I simply accept my unhappy lot and try and keep my mind a blank. Then, when things grow pleasanter, I begin to think again and dream, when throng back to me the bonny hours of the past tinged with the old touch of distant poetry, which led my thoughts in those happy days into the strange

paths of the imagination. A familiar boulevard or some spot where I have often been suddenly rises up before me, as formerly a snatch of music or a bit of verse would bring to mind dreamlands and the realms of legend. But now neither music nor poetry is necessary to accomplish this; the intensity of our dear souvenirs, mother mine, suffices. Now I cannot even imagine what a new life might be; all I know is that we are, indeed, leading a life, but for whom and for what, is of little consequence. What I do know and feel perfectly sure of is that the harvest of French genius will be gathered in and the intellectuality of our race will not suffer permanently from the terrible depletion inflicted on it by this war. Who can say whether the peasant, companion in arms of the fallen thinker, may not be the heir to the latter's thoughts? There is nothing to disprove this magnificent possibility. The farmer lad who has seen a young savant, a young artist, die, may take up the interrupted task; he may be the connecting link in an evolution which has been only momentarily checked. Real sacrifice consists in abandoning the hope of being, you yourself, the torch-bearer. It is well for the child at play to carry the flag, but the man must be

satisfied with knowing that the flag will be carried, whatever happens. This is the lesson august nature is teaching me every moment, and it reassures my sometimes doubting heart; for nature makes flags of every thing, flags that are finer than those to which we, with our petty habits, cling—flags of science, flags of art; a flake in the air often equals us. There will always be eyes to see and bring together information of sky and earth.

*January 26.*

Last night I got thy dear letter of the twentieth. You must not blame me too severely if, sometimes, as in my letter of the thirteenth inst., I let it be seen that I am lacking in the very thing I am always striving to acquire. But I beg thee to try and imagine what must be the state of mind of a young man in full productivity, at the moment when his life should be one perpetual flowering, to find himself suddenly torn away from his congenial surroundings and transported to an arid soil where all of his usual food is lacking. Yet, once having taken his bearings, he feels that life has not entirely abandoned him and he begins forthwith to draw nourishment from the stinted resources of his

new estate. But this is not an easy task, and sometimes requires such a concentration of energy that no place is left for indulging in old memories or future hopes. A constant effort must be made to adapt one's self to the surrounding circumstances. I generally succeed in accomplishing this except in moments of revolt, which are, however, promptly repressed, when there rise up, as if I had never forgotten them, the thoughts and acts of my former life. It is then I need all my strength to drown these heart-rending souvenirs in the resignation demanded by the moment.

I was thinking, too, when I wrote that letter, of the unhappy hours you also have to pass, and this was one of the reasons why I urged thee to take such an impersonal view of our union. I know how strong you are and how well prepared you are to accept this way of looking at the situation. You are quite right, however, in objecting to my anticipation of suffering and in holding that it is time to cross a bridge when we come to it. But my excuse is that at moments one does not clearly distinguish the suffering of the present hour and the suffering which may come. Please note, however, that I do not abandon hope, and that I count upon an over-



ruling mercy. But, anxious above all things to be an artist at all times and in every way, I am ever trying to discover in the life about me as much beauty as possible, and as quickly as possible, not knowing how much time is left me for this.

*January 27. Afternoon.*

After two bad nights in cantonment, due to our having no straw to sleep on, the third was interrupted by a hasty departure for our positions in the second line, where I have been able to get some sleep. The weather is fine; cold and sunshine. Grand old nature is again beginning to fold her friendly arms around me, and her voice, which is now stronger, is comforting me.

But, dearest, what a gap there is in my existence. Yes, since my promotion, I have passed moments which, though less terrible, recall those of the beginning of September. But I must not forget the many mercies that have come with them. I accept this new life, but it does not follow that I can see into the future.

*January 28. In the morning sunshine.*

The weather, which is severe but splendid, is wonderful in that its pure sky tends to awaken

all the poetry that is in one. Yes, what I tried to tell thee of these fine snowy days came from a heart comforted by this triumphant beauty.

In the periodicals you have sent me, I have read with pleasure the articles on Molière, on the English Parliament, on Martainville,<sup>1</sup> and on the religious questions in 1830.

Did I tell thee that I saw by the newspapers that Hillemacher<sup>2</sup> had been killed? This charming fellow has fallen in this awful war.

*February 1.*

*Very dear Mother:* I have received thy letters of the twenty-sixth and the twenty-seventh ult., and, believe me, they have put new life into me. Our first-line positions—this time in the village—have, up to now, been favored with a complete calm, and I have again experienced those hours of grace in which nature so consoles me. My present official position carries with it this special characteristic that now, when I am performing camp drudgery, I feel that I am acting from a sentiment of duty affect-

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<sup>1</sup> Alphonse Martainville (1776-1830), French journalist and dramatist.

<sup>2</sup> One of the competitors at the Paris School of Fine Arts for the Roman Prize of 1915.

ing the whole general body, and not under orders emanating from mere army regulations.

*February 2.*

*Dear Mother:* I continue this letter in the cantonment where a lot of fatigue duties fill up the spare moments that would otherwise cause time to weigh on my hands and spirits. But, nevertheless, I am in a sort of a fit of the dumps, where nothingness seems to be the chief end of everything, though all that happens around me proves the contrary and speaks to me of the plenitude of the universe. Yes, devotion, not to individuals, but to humanity in mass, sustains me. What magnificent examples of this do we find in Jesus among the poor—this Just One, who, by performing a thankless task, reveals to us the boundlessness of altruistic duty, and especially teaches the lesson of expecting no reward for good works. Through my experience of men and things, I have gained that tranquil state of mind where one expects nothing from others. Then duty assumes an abstract form disassociated from any of the selfish human aims which veil the atrocity of this present situation.

I am going to describe to thee our three days'

sojourn in the front trenches. Let me begin by saying that we had today a wonderful sunrise, and that spring is coming, though it is snowing and freezing. As we went down the slopes which lead up to our positions in the village, the night was so beautiful that all the soldiers were struck by it. But I fear it is quite impossible for me to give thee an exact idea of the delicate features of this region. How can I adequately picture to thee this chased work of the tree branches melting into a dream of mists and the moon sailing majestically through it all? For three consecutive nights my duties have transported me into the heart of this purity and whiteness, where the shadows on the trees were as refined as the goldsmith's art, and where, in spite of the *camaïeu*, or single color effect, reddish and blue tints were spread over the scene. There are now moments here of such beauty that he who grasps them feels that he cannot die. For instance, I am now far in advance of our first-line positions, and yet never have I felt so convinced that I am under some special protection. How could it be otherwise when I came back this morning and saw the sun rising in pink and green and spreading its rays over pink and blue snow, where a wide stretch

of landscape was checkered with snow-covered woods and fields, while in the far-away background the silvery surface of the Meuse faded out of sight? Here was beauty in spite of all our wickedness.

*February 2.*

After endless days of sadness have come sudden and fugitive flashes of philosophy—duty, an austere but comforting refuge; and along with this were some views of unheard-of beauty.

*February 3.*

*Dear loved Mother:* I have this moment received here in cantonment thy letter of the twenty-ninth ult. This is an anonymous day without any distinctive mark of its own, though there is a mysterious impression of spring in the atmosphere. The lengthening days give a new touch of warmth to the air and a sudden mildness is spreading over the surface of nature. Alas! how sweet by contrast would be this emotion if we were not in this present bondage; but the gentleness of spring renders still heavier this burden. Dear Mother, how happy it makes me to feel that far-away friends have such warm

sympathy for me. What kindness there is in this poor world, after all.

I am so glad to have the reviews. I have remarked this sentence in an excellent article on Louis Veuillot:<sup>1</sup> "O my God! relieve me of my despair and leave me my pain." Yes, we should not ignore the fecund lesson of suffering, and, doubtless, if I return from this war, I shall come back with an enriched and well-formed soul. I have also read with pleasure the lectures on Molière, and there, as elsewhere, I have noticed the solitude in which superior souls move. But, thanks to those old sentimental wounds of mine, I never suffer any more from the acts of others. But, beloved Mother, I will write thee in better spirits tomorrow.

*February 4.*

Last evening, when I came back to my barn, I found everybody drunk. There were quarrels, shouting, songs, and yelling. Such is our life here at times. But this morning, with these disagreeable experiences of the night before still in mind, I got up earlier than usual, and

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<sup>1</sup> Distinguished French ultramontane publicist (1813-83).



there was my friend the moon and majestic night retiring before the morning, which took pity on me. This blessed and spring-like day gilds all with its own brightness, dispenses promises, and gives all fresh hope.

Dearest, I have been thinking about that title which Tolstoy chose for his book—*War and Peace*. I used to suppose that he had in mind the antithesis between these two states; but I now ask myself if he did not associate these two contrary conditions in the same inanity, if he did not consider with equal pain humanity, whether at war or in peace. Of course, I believe that we should ever try to be good; but, in spite of ourselves, we understand this rule of conduct much as we do the exhortation of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, which paints on its street signs: "Be kind to dumb beasts." How hard it is to control our actions as the occasion arises during our daily experiences.

*February 5.*

A sleepless night. Returning to the barn, we found things in an abominable state. In fact, there was such a row on that the corporals complained and punishments were inflicted. We

went on a march this morning, and to get rested therefrom we worked this evening!

*February 6.*

*Dear loved Mother:* After the sleepless night in the cantonment, due largely to an overdose of *vinasse*, that poor, cheap wine which the men seem to like, we had work to do through to the morning. So I have been sleeping all day and have just got round to writing to thee. You can get some idea of what my present existence is when I confess that sleep and night are about the only conditions in which life has any attractions for me.

Dear Mother, I have been going over again that beautiful Sarpedon<sup>1</sup> legend and I find this exquisite flower of Greek poetry still a consolation to me. Read this episode of the *Iliad* in my fine translation by Lecomte de l'Isle,<sup>2</sup> and you will perceive that Zeus, face to face with Destiny, speaks words in which the sentiment of the eternal and the divine stand out as nobly as in the Christian Passion. He suffers, and there

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<sup>1</sup> A Lycian prince, son of Jupiter and an ally of the Trojans, who fell at Troy and whose body was carried home for burial by Sleep and Death.

<sup>2</sup> French poet (1818-94), whose translations from the Greek are famous in French literature.

is a long struggle in his paternal heart before he can bring himself to accept the death of his son. Then Hypnos and Thanatos are sent to bring back the loved remains of the dead prince. Hypnos, as you know, is the Greek god of sleep. To think that I should have reached the point where I welcome sleep! I who formerly found every hour of the day a joy; I who took pride in every instant of activity. But now I find myself longing for this way of escaping from the tumult which surrounds me.

The fine spirit of Hellenic optimism you find beaming in all its brightness on those vases in the Louvre Museum, where the two genii are represented as perpetuating Sarpedon after his human end. We must all admit that Sleep and Death enlarge and infinitely prolong our determinism, that is, materialistic fatalism. Thanatos, Death, is a mystery whose horror is due to the misunderstanding of it which our immediate appetites generally prevent being dissipated—we can see only the horror of it. But look at the grand way Maeterlinck presents the subject in his book on death.<sup>1</sup> His strong words, permeated by a spirit of peace, awaken

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<sup>1</sup> "La Mort" (1913). ("Death, an Essay," Dodd, Mead and Company, N. Y.)

a sympathetic echo among us here in this fearful theater, where death is always with us.

*February 7.*

*Very dear and much loved Mother:* I received yesterday thy admirable letter of the first inst. Please don't ever hesitate to send me what you characterize as idle gossip. It is not such to me. Thy love for me and the identity of our hearts come out in all thy letters. That is what interests me the most in them. But in addition, they bring me a thousand other tender things which are vital to me.

We are having a hard time of it now. But my non-commissioned grade makes things a little lighter for me. The men, however, are now serving five nights at a time without any real sleep, and after five nights of rest, have five more nights in the trenches.

*February 9.*

Once again, when I was on the point of giving way, I find myself in an oasis, and the moment of consolation comes. The breeze which refreshes, fans me once more. I have had the good fortune to be designated corporal of the guard in a charming spot where I am chief in

command. In addition, we have with us beautiful spring weather. But what can I say of this nature whose secret powers I never before felt so keenly? The hours and the seasons succeed one another with such certitude, so unescapably, with such all-embracing impassibility, that he who waits for their coming feels in them the enormity of the initial energy of nature. I have often experienced the joy of the advent of spring or some other season, but never before have I lived every instant of it as I do now. How one thus acquires, without the aid of any instruction, a vague but unquestionable intuition of the absolute. A poor human being, possessing, perhaps, the genius of a savant, may declare that he has not found God with his scalpel. What a shocking blunder on the part of a superior mind. But why is there any need of a scalpel when the joy and the quivering of the senses suffice to tell us of the immutable order which rules all evolution? The poet sees the seasons come just as we do the big ships whose return can be computed. Sometimes they may be delayed by the tempests, but finally they arrive in spite of all things, bringing with them the perfumes of unknown lands. So, too, a returning season seems to

fetch with it the pleasures acquired in the course of a long voyage.

Ah! dear Mother, may we still be blessed with isolation. Oh! the joys of solitude for those who are worthy of it. But how this solitude is broken in upon sometimes. Perhaps it is a blessing in disguise, a privilege, which destiny offers our generation by making it the witness of these horrors. But what a ransom is paid therefor. However, we must never forget that eternal Faith rules all things—faith in evolution and in an order which surpasses our poor human patience.

*February 11. Second day in the first-line trenches.*

It is necessary in moments like the present to seek refuge in a sacrifice above and beyond what is human, for it is impossible for poor mortals to go any further in this direction than we have already gone. We must renounce all earthly hope and look for consolation elsewhere. As for myself, I have not found myself these last days worthy to be anything more than a souvenir; and as a souvenir of me, I send thee some flowers which I have culled in the midst of the mud where we are floundering.



*Five p. m.* — In spite of everything, we must have courage, courage whatever comes.

*February 13. Fourth day in the first line.*

*Dearest:* After revolts, accompanied by flows of tears which have shaken my whole moral and physical frame during all of this recent period, I have finally been able to get possession of myself again so as to be able to say, "Thy will be done." And in so far as my abilities are equal to the task, I would like to be one who, up to the very end, does not despair of laboring in the building up of the Temple. I would like to be that workman who, though he knows that the scaffolding on which he stands will crumble without him being saved, nevertheless goes right on sculpturing the ornaments of the cathedral. I say ornaments, for never could I carry up the great stone blocks, especially as there are masons for that sort of work. Yes, I have again found the calm, and if I have not attained that universal repose for which I have prayed, I do, at moments, catch glimpses of that serene light, where everything, even our own affections, take on a new aspect and are transfigured.

I am sitting as I write thee at the foot of a

hill which ends in a precipice, whose harmonious outlines are of nature's handiwork. Here man is hunting man, and a pitched battle between them is imminent. In the meanwhile a skylark is winging his flight up into the air, and as I go on writing thee a strange feeling of serenity takes possession of me; a something that is extremely consoling; either a human assurance or a revelation from above; the while everybody around me is sleeping.

*February 14. Fifth day in the first line.*

All is agitation around us, and we, too, are on the move. The nearer the inevitable approaches, the greater is the calmness which takes possession of my heart. My dear country is defiled by abominable preparations to attack her, and the silence is broken by the preliminary cannonading. For the moment man succeeds in violating all that is beautiful; but in spite of everything, I feel sure that Beauty will find a refuge somewhere.

During the past twenty-four hours I have become myself again. Dear Mother, my regrets about my "ivory tower" are culpable. What one takes too often for the ivory tower is simply the cheese of the rat become hermit.

On the contrary, may a better spirit move me to recognize the benefits springing from this tempest which has snatched me from a too pleasant existence; and let us thank the Destinies who, at moments during these never-to-be-forgotten hours, have made a man of me. No, I do not regret that dead youth of mine which has led me by diverse paths to heights where, at times, are dispersed the mists which becloud the understanding.

*February 16.*

During these past days I have been living hours which the grand problems of the universe, become more visible to me, have made capital and decisive in my existence. We were kept five days in the front-line positions, where the service was exceedingly difficult and made all the more so by a dreadful mud. The longer we stayed there, and while I was keeping up the struggle against a frightful sadness of soul, we all felt that the situation was becoming more and more strained, for we perceived that greater and greater preparations were being made for an attack. So we were not surprised later that such an order had been issued to take effect in one or two days. Then it was that I

wrote thee two letters — those of the thirteenth and fourteenth, I think; and, will you believe it? as I went on writing thee, I felt spread over me such a spirit of plenitude and suavity that I could not but become convinced that the only real things in this world are the good and the beautiful. In the meantime the bombardment of our positions went on violently; but nothing that emanates from man, whatever it may be, can smother what nature says to the soul.

On the night between the fourteenth and the fifteenth, we took our places in the trenches which were swept by machine guns. But our men were so worn out that the attack had to be made by another battalion. However, there we waited in the water and in the cold night, expecting any minute to be ordered to charge, when we suddenly learned that we were relieved; but for what reason we were not told. So here we are again in this village where the men are drowning in wine the dejection of spirit which pervades their poor souls; and here, too, am I in this crowd.

Dear Mother, if there is an absolute state in the order of human feelings, it is suffering. Until this war broke out, I had lived in relatively charming emotions in which was lost the

real significance of life. But now I feel what life really is—the instrument which clears the way for the soul to attain the absolute. But I have suffered less from existing in this transitory state than I am suffering now from association with the persons with whom I am brought into contact.

*Nine p. m., February 16.*

*Dear beloved Mother:* I was at table when I was told that we are to start at midnight. I was sure that this is what would happen; so the countermanding of that attack simply resulted in our having to march some twenty-four miles in addition to the fatigue of our sojourn in the first line. As we were leaving our sector of the attacking line, I saw such a lot of artillery being brought up that I guessed there would be no repose for us. But here where we are I find at least calm of soul, while the sky is full of stars. The weather is freezing.

*February 19. Post card sent in the midst of the battle.*

Only a word. We are in the hands of God. Never, never have we needed more completely confiding wisdom. Death is at work, but it does

not reign. Life is still noble. Dead and wounded yesterday and day before. Dearest, letters will probably arrive very late.

*February 22.*

We are back in cantonment after the great battle.<sup>1</sup> This time I saw everything. I did my duty, and the kindly way in which everybody treats me proves it. But the best of us are dead; a painful loss. The regiment was heroic. We gained what we were aiming at. Fuller details later.

*February 22. First day in cantonment.*

*Dear well-beloved Mother:* I shall speak to thee of the kindness of God and of the horror of all that has happened. The heaviness of soul which I have been trying to bear up under for the past month and a half was anxiety over what was reserved for us during these past days.

We reached the scene of action on the seventeenth. But the preliminaries did not interest me; I was waiting for the fight to begin. This

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<sup>1</sup> In the Argonne region during this period, great activity was in course on both sides, but no special name has been given to any of these encounters.



happened at three o'clock with the explosion of nine mine-shafts which had been driven under the enemy's trenches. It sounded like distant thunder. Then over five hundred cannon let hell loose, and in the midst of all this we charged. By the time darkness came on, we had pretty firmly intrenched ourselves in our conquered positions, which I was engaged the whole night in strengthening. I had to pass over a rather large area in the obscurity, and I was continually stumbling on the dead and wounded of both sides. My heart was moved for all of them, but I could only speak to them in their distress. Up to this time our men had not suffered much; but when morning came, we were forced back, with considerable loss, to our former positions. But in the evening, we went at it again and retook the lost ground; and here once more I did my duty. At one moment I rushed forward to receive the sword of a German officer who wished to surrender, and the next moment I was busy stationing men in the posts we were to hold. Our captain used me as his aid and I drew for him a plan of our position. He told me he was going to have me mentioned in dispatches; but scarcely were the words out of his mouth when he was killed out-

right under my very eyes. Furthermore, during the horrible three-days' bombardment, I organized and kept going the supply service of cartridges, when three of my men were wounded. Our losses are terrible, but those of the enemy still greater. You cannot imagine, dear Mother, what awful things man can do to man. For the past five days my shoes have been positively soaked in human brains; I have crushed under foot the chests of my fellows, and my eyes could behold only entrails. What little they can get, the soldiers eat along side of dead bodies. The regiment was heroic. We have lost all our officers — all killed sword in hand. Two good friends of mine were slain — one a handsome young fellow who sat for the last portrait I made. One of my most frightful experiences that evening was my suddenly coming on his corpse, pale and magnificent, in the moonlight. I stopped a moment near him and the sight awakened the ever latent spirit of beauty in me. Finally, after five days of horror, which cost us twelve hundred lives, we were withdrawn from this place of abomination. The whole regiment is mentioned in dispatches. Dear Mother, who can ever tell all of the unheard-of things which my eyes have beheld and

who can ever number the certitudes which this tempest revealed to me? Duty, effort!

*February 23.*

*Very dear loved Mother:* This is our second day in cantonment and tomorrow we return to the front. Dearest, I cannot write thee at this moment. Let us get nearer to what is eternal and let us both cling close to duty. I know thy thoughts are ever speeding towards mine, while I am ever turning towards what I feel is best for our happiness. Let us both be courageous—I among all these young dead, and thou waiting resignedly for whatever may come. God is with us.

*February 26. A fine afternoon.*

*Dear Mother:* Here I am again on the battlefield. We have climbed up on the heights where it would be more decent for me to contemplate the glory of God than to reprove the horrors of man. The innumerable bodies which one saw immediately after the battle are disappearing little by little, and the few that are left have now taken on the color of earth and are repellent to eye and nostril. The losses are called in the official bulletin, "serious." I can

assure thee our soldiers are admirable in their heroic resignation. All of them deplore this shameful war, but the majority feel that the performance of a horrible duty is the only thing which, at the present moment, can excuse the fearful necessity of being a man. But, dear Mother, I can go on no further in this narration. The plain is now sinking to sleep bathed in mauve and pink. But how is it possible for such horrors to be?

*February 28. In cantonment.*

*Dear beloved Mother and dearly beloved Grandmother:* I write you just after coming out of a most dreadful nightmare during which I lived Dantesque hours. What Gustave Doré had the audacity to perceive in the text of the *Divine Comedy*, has just been realized with the varied additional details which reality always gives to things of the imagination. In the midst of fatigues whose only advantage is that they render one less sensitive, I could get some idea of what was profitable in our torments. Let me explain the matter a little.

On the evening of the twenty-fourth, we returned to our positions, where already some attempt had been made to render the surround-

ings less repulsive. But here and there could still be seen human members which had already taken on the appearance of the earth to which they were returning. The weather was fine and cold, and the heights which we had conquered placed us high up in the sky; so the outlook on land and heaven was brightened. Above, the stars shone; below, the plain was red from conflagrations. The Germans were keeping up a fearful bombardment, but their shells were wasted on us. I was ensconced in a dugout, whence I could follow the course of the moon, and there I waited quietly for morning to come. At times a shell would sprinkle me with earth and deafen me, and then a dead calm would spread over the frozen ground. So I had instances of solitude with God, though I had to pay dear for them.

I think I have pretty well adapted myself to the necessities of this military existence, at least in the eyes of my superiors, since, as I have already written thee, I am proposed for the grade of sergeant and I am to be mentioned in dispatches. But, my dear mother, this war is long, too long for those who feel that they have a real task to perform in this world. What you tell me of the sympathy felt for me at Paris of



course gives me pleasure, but it will not take me out of this position and transfer me elsewhere where I could be better utilized. I sometimes ask myself why I am thus sacrificed, while others who are not so good as I am escape. Though I had something good to do on earth, since God will not avert this bitter cup, may His will be done.

*March 3. In cantonment.*

Today is the fourth we have passed in repose, and for me it has been nearly a vacation, a rather sad one, however, which recalls certain sojourns at Marlotte—days passed in efforts to build up physical and moral fatigue, and to fill up hours now so empty and bare. But this is at least a repose, or rather a halt in an onward march, which makes it possible for me to classify somewhat impressions whose violent character has left me in a rather confused state of mind. I am especially shaken by the noise of the bursting shells. Think of it, on the French side 40,000 shells passed over us and about as many on the German side, but with this difference, that the latter burst right over our heads and among us. One of these shells buried me under a mass of earth which it threw up. In addi-



tion, a lot of shrapnels exploded all around us. After having gone through such an experience I am excusable, perhaps, if I ask to be allowed to live a little while longer, especially in the furtive sunshine of March. The result is that my brain has been left in a very muddled condition and I am only just beginning to read again. I have been glancing over a review article which criticizes three new novels. In fact, this reading lightens somewhat the cares of our present first-line duties.

I have received a fine letter from André, who must be in our neighborhood. I am glad to see that he holds much the same opinion as I do in regard to this dreadful war literature. I find more comfort in music. Of what remains to me of my modest little stock of accomplishments, musical improvization is perhaps the best. Thus, during this whole night I have been listening to the most beautiful orchestrated symphonies, and, I may say it to thee, for this treat I was indebted for the most part to those grand German composers.

*March 5. Sixth day in cantonment.*

I wish I had in me still the extreme sensibility which I once had, so that I could give the

true color and the exact outlines of the tragedy through which we have just passed. But this I cannot do, at least for some time to come, as I am in a sort of benumbed state, which, while it may be in itself a happy condition when compared with what preceded it, muddles a bit my vision of things and doesn't let me see perfectly clearly into the future. I still have to make an effort to get back to a correct notion of eternal and stable things, though this effort is not always crowned with success. But some of the spectacles of that devastated field taught such a beautiful lesson, one so noble and so convincing, that I would like, along with thee, to feel again the admirable certainties of these last few days.

For instance, how harmonious death is in the ground, and how much more genial it is to see the body returning to mother earth than to see it the victim of the human paltriness of our conventional funeral ceremonies. But yesterday I would have felt that those poor abandoned dead were wronged, yet now, after attending a few hours ago, the formal burial of an officer, I am convinced that nature has a more tender pity for her children than has man. Yes, indeed, the death of a soldier is almost a natu-

ral thing. It is an honest horror which meets universal violence face to face. Many times recently I have passed near dead bodies in uniform that were slowly sinking away into a natural grave and this new life of theirs with earth was less repulsive to me than the cold and unalterable sight of the city tombs. On account of our life in the open air, our conception of things has become so free and broad, our gesture and thought so ample, that those of us who return to the walks of man will find your cities repellent and artificial. But, dear Mother, I fear that I write thee badly of the things which I have felt nobly; yet let us take refuge in the peace of spring and the treasure of the passing moment.

*Ten-thirty a. m., March 7.*

*Dear well-beloved Mother:* I am filling up the idle moments of this morning by enjoying the sight of the clear waters of the Meuse, which animates the graces of the valleys and the gardens round about us here. The gamboling of the current among the reeds and pebbles offers my weary soul a reposeful spectacle and reflects the calm life of this big village sheltered by the river's heights. The church is

full of soldiers, who, like me, feel that there is a definitive ideal, but who desire a more formal and less direct manifestation of it than I do.

I am taking board for a fortnight in the house where, almost two months ago, our happy little band lived. But today I saw these fine fellows in tears when they learned who had been killed and wounded.

Before leaving for here I received your sleeping bags; they go all right. But I am bothered with rheumatism, which, during almost two months, has spoiled many of my nights in cantonment. Dear Mother dear, a calm has come over the usual hullabaloo of the barracks, where our life will be led for some little time to come. As all of us now here are non-commissioned officers, we are all forced to do fatigue duty, and so I am renewing my acquaintance with broom and menial work in general. But we were told beforehand that we would have to perform considerable manual labor of one kind and another; all this so that we may learn how, later, to direct others.

*Later.*—Mild weather after rain. In the evening the church bells. The running water goes on singing under the bridges, but the trees are going to sleep. Good night to thee, too.

March 11.

*Dear Mother dear:* There is nothing to say about my present existence, as everything now moves along normally. At moments, perhaps, an image of the past is evoked or a memory rises up, but as a rule I sit here stagnant, with aching bones, except when, as happens today, I read some fine article like that of Renan's on "The Origins of the Bible,"<sup>1</sup> which appeared in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* for March, 1886. If I can only manage to retain some of it, my ideas on the subject, which are rather conflicting, will be clarified, perhaps. In fact, I am much as if I had risen from a bed of typhoid fever. I am weak in body and mind, and the simplest things find a response in my soul. Just now I get a lot of pleasure out of the water which abounds here—the sluggish current of the Meuse, the springs murmuring through the grass and over the pebbles, the ponds dormant under the big trees, the cascades and rills splashing on the listening ear. On the steep hillsides the snow shines in a dreamy light. I live in all this, though I am not quite

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<sup>1</sup> "Les Origines de la Bible," by Ernest Renan (1822-92), learned French philologist and historian, member of the Academy.



equal to telling how I do it. I am, in fact, a little ashamed to vegetate in this wise, but I think we are all like this every time we quit that hell at the front. I eat and sleep, too, when my dreadful lumbago will let me. So don't be too hard on me, please, if I am thus below the mark. I am as if I were deprived of my armor. But, then, in the end, what difference does all this make?

*Five p. m.*—I am back from drill rather tired. But this fine Meuse air always keeps me in good trim. Dear Mother, I would once more strive towards all that is beautiful and noble; I would like ever to feel in me the inspiration which bears me towards the spiritual riches of life. But alas! for the moment my soul is as heavy as lead.

*Sunday morning, March 14. In Sabbath peace.*

*Dear Mother dear:* Thy good and vivifying letters have at last reached me. If I had been at the front I would have got them more promptly. So this privation is the ransom I have been forced to pay for the substantial happiness I am enjoying in this reposeful spot, where, at this moment, the pretty town is awakening in the morning mists of the Meuse and



the brook is hurrying along over the well-washed pebbles. Everything has the precious, moderate, delicate touch which is the dominant characteristic of the region.

I have been reading a little, but we are all so tired from the exercises which we are put through that I go to sleep as soon as we get back. We are now engaged in making a lot of trenches.

Dear Mama, let us return to those extraordinary moments at the end of February. I may say again that I recall the whole affair just as I would the stages of a scientific experiment. My conception of violence had been, up to that moment, of a theoretic-formula sort and I thought I had settled what its rôle was in the universe. But I had never been given an opportunity to note the practical effect of it, except under very trivial circumstances. In this instance, however, the manifestation of the working of violence was on such a scale that all my receptive faculties had to be brought into play in order to grasp its full meaning. I must confess it was an interesting study, though I should add that during the crisis I never lost my balance, but followed things and events in a cold, impersonal manner. My sensitive eye was the peculiarity

of my temperament which here stood me in good stead and enabled me to mark some of the scenic effects whose dramatic side was as artistic, if I may be permitted such a word in such a connection, as that seen in any human creation. But, unlike what usually happens on such occasions, I kept my head and clung to my original intention of "seeing how the thing worked." I am very happy to be able to say that never once during the battle did the mad excitement caused by carnage get possession of me, and I trust it will always be so.

Unfortunately, this contact with the German race has spoilt forever my opinion of them. Of course, I could not assume the responsibility of allowing myself to be controlled by misplaced sensibility or humanitarianism when such feelings would have made me, in this instance, the dupe of a crafty enemy; but I confess I found myself accepting a state of tolerating what I once would have considered an abomination and the negation of all that is worthy in life.

I have seen the French in battle. They are terrible in action, but magnanimous when the struggle is over. This phrase may be very trite and commonplace, found in the mouths of our greatest writers and in the mouths of our sim-

plest school boys, but my former decadent, overcivilized intellectualism finds no other which adequately expresses the impression which the French soul makes on the observer in great events of this sort.

*March 14.*

TO MADAME DE L.

My mother has told me of the great blow which has again fallen upon you. What heavy afflictions some unfortunate souls have to bear in this life! I know how strong you are and with what habitual fortitude you suffer pain; but how fervently I wish you had been saved this one. My mother had told me how all news about Colonel de B. was lacking and how much this fact worried her. So I was prepared to hear the worst. We men at the front are anxious only about those of us who are on the firing line. But we know that there is in the spectacle of the soldier who falls a lesson of grandeur and of eternity which arms one for whatever comes—a lesson which we would like to see those dear to us at home profit by. Rest assured, dear Madame, that the Colonel's example will bear a magnificent fruitage. I am sure of this, for I have seen similar instances—the

heroism which transfigures the soldier whose chief has fallen.

To me the times have been fertile in tragic events. I have lived through hours of violence, during which I have tried to do my duty. I have seen my chiefs fall and the regiment decimated. No longer is there any human hope for him who is in the fiery furnace. I have placed myself in the hands of God, asking him only to keep me in such a state of mind and heart that I can appreciate in His creation all that man has not disfigured; the true proportions of my life's past events I can grasp no longer.

*March 15.*

*Dearly loved Mother:* I think you now perceive the grace that was accorded me when I was assigned to this platoon. Whatever God may have in store for me in the coming days, this respite here has enabled me to get full possession of myself again and to prepare myself submissively, happen what may. Standing face to face with destiny, I send thee my love and our union. Farewell.

*March 17.*

A charming morning; a white sun enveloped in mist, silhouetted trees on the heights, and the

vast landscape bathed in light. This is a privileged period. The other day while reading an old number of the *Revue des Deux Mondes* for 1880 I found myself in the midst of a fine article, just as when one enters a noble palace with sumptuous vaulted ceiling and richly decorated walls. The subject was Egypt and it was signed George Perrot.<sup>1</sup> Yesterday my battalion left the cantonment *en alerte*, but I am kept here to continue my instruction for my sergeantship. How thankful I am for this respite, which, however, is not a sinecure, though it does permit me to enjoy what is very dear to me — a lucid mind and a heart open to nature.

I forgot to tell thee that during the battle of the other day I saw in the evening the cranes coming back north, and a lull in the fight made it possible even to hear their cries. It seems so long since I saw them depart on their southern journey. I remember that when they left us at the beginning of winter everything appeared to grow sadder afterwards. Their coming back is like a dove from Noah's ark; not that I dissimulate the dangers which remain,

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<sup>1</sup> Georges Perrot (1832-1914), French archeologist. "Les Etudes d'Archéologie," etc., *Revue des Deux Mondes*, August 1, 1880.



but these ambassadors of the air brought me a more visible assurance of the universal calm which prevails in the midst of our human frenzy. Yesterday it was the wild ducks which turned their wings northwards. They formed various patterns as they flocked together in the heavens and then disappeared on the horizon like a long floating ribbon.

I appreciate very much the high opinion which M. Chevrillon has of me. I had a taste for letters, even when a child, and I have always regretted that the irregular way in which I was educated left so many gaps in my intellectual make-up. But throughout all my scholastic vicissitudes I always preserved the faculty of picking up right and left any choice bit of knowledge encountered by the way. As I can't tell what may happen, I, of course, say nothing about my desire to make the personal acquaintance of M. Chevrillon. This pleasure will have to be adjourned till more favorable times.

I have written to Madame L. This will be the final blow for her. It is the lot of some persons to be a sort of medal on which are struck all the signs of pain. Adversity has hammered them so full of these that there is no



place left to put in joy. But I suppose that such a complete turning of a life into channels which lead only to distress must finally find some compensation, if only that of at last feeling that the sources of misfortunes are at length dried up. It is indeed something to have a limit set to human distress. Destinies of this kind make the impression on me of sentinels who defend others from the attacks of a contrary destiny.

Every day I see a new cross in the little military cemetery, while victorious springtime spreads over all.

*March 19.*

Our vacation is going to end in pleasantness, while tumult and carnage are raging not far away. I hear the regiment has done well again.

*March 20.*

*Dear Mother dear:* After so many instances of grace, I should have more confidence, and I am going to make renewed efforts to give myself up completely to God. But these are hard times for us. I have just heard of the death, among many others, of a friend of mine who was my bedfellow at the cantonment. He had

just been made a second lieutenant. Dear Mother, love is the only human sentiment which one may cherish at such a time as this.

*March 21.*

*Dear Grandmother:* As the hour of trial approaches, I seize the occasion to send thee my whole love; it is all that I can do. The situation is going to demand sacrifices, in the presence of which we must forget all that binds us elsewhere. But let us pray that the certitude of the Beautiful and the Good does not abandon us in the midst of our sufferings.

*Sunday, March 21. In the most beautiful sunshine.*

*Dear well-beloved Mother:* I think we are going to stay here a day longer and get started only on Tuesday. I don't know where I shall find my battalion or in what condition I shall find it, for the present action is very violent and drags on. The reports are very contradictory as regards gains, but as regards victims, all agree that the number is very large. We can hear from where we are a most vigorous cannonading going on, and the fine weather will

probably decide both commanders to push forward the attack.

I would like to talk much to thee about this noble nature which envelops me with its glory, but at the present moment the truth is that my thoughts are elsewhere—there where the sun does not bring men together for its own worship, but to furnish light in which to develop hatred, and where night serves only to produce anguish and ruse. The other day as I was gazing on this noble expanse of country now offering itself to spring, I felt joy in being a man. But now what is it to be a man!

Our neighboring regiment has come back with its companies reduced to forty men. I dare no longer speak of hope. The only grace one may ask is to be allowed to exhaust all that the passing moment offers of the beautiful. Here is a new way "of living one's life" never foreseen by literature. But, dear Grandmother, what a great support to me in these trials has been thy tenderness.

*March 22.*

We have a burning sun today, which makes one wonder how it can be that, with such warmth and brightness around us we can still

be in the midst of war. Spring has come in triumphantly and caught men in a fit of madness and in the very act of outraging creation. Fortunately, the official bulletin says nothing about what is going on, so this adds to the deception that we cannot be in the midst of war and rumors of war, and as I have now been for three weeks away from the front, I can scarcely picture to myself the monstrous things going on there. But, dear Mother, I know that thy life and mine have both had but one aim, and that even during these recent days we have striven more nearly to attain it; so perhaps our lives will not have been useless. At present the only consolation of an ambitious soul is to try and foresee in what form his thoughts will be reechoed in the years to come. It seems to me that if it should be accorded me to live I would never interrupt this effort of ours; but being certain only of the present, I am striving to put into it the best of me.

*March 25.*

*Dear Mother dear:* Here I am living again a burrow existence. I have found the same spot where I was last month. While I have been away nothing has happened. A strong

attack on our part was tried, but didn't accomplish anything. They utilized regiments which were inferior to ours in what goes to the making of good soldiers under fire, so all they succeeded in doing was to get cut to pieces and to draw down upon us a terrible bombardment. It appears that the preceding combat was as nothing in comparison with this one. My company lost heavily from air torpedoes. These projectiles, which are over a yard long and nearly a foot in diameter, are fired very high up into the air and then fall straight down, so that they penetrate the most defiladed hollows and explode there. So we are now living several yards underground and go out only at night for fatigue duty. Fortunately, the weather is clement.

Dearest, I would like to tell thee a whole lot of things of a happy nature, but, as I have already written thee, there are some which must not be awakened by words. Our clumsy human joy might frighten them, perhaps be repugnant to them, might even cause them to faint away!

I take up my letter again after a nap. In our casements we sleep as much as we can. Before I lay down I had my head full of

thoughts which I was too tired to jot down. Among these I was thinking of Beethoven. I am now just the age he was when he was stricken with disease and I recall the fine example he set of laboring under great difficulties. The obstacles in his way must have seemed to him as unsurmountable as does the present one to us. But he came off victorious. To my mind Beethoven is the finest human example of creative power.

But I am afraid I am not writing well, as I am still half asleep.

How everything concerning my return here was made easy and softened with kindness. I left our castle quite alone, and passing in front of a battery of artillery, I was treated in a most fraternal manner by the non-commissioned officers. The artillery has a friendly feeling for the infantry who protect them, and they, who are not even exposed to the rain, show a warm sentiment of pity for us.

But I must stop rather abruptly, repeating once more that thy courage sustains me. Whatever comes, I will have found joy here below. Why, even the night on which I arrived here was superbly beautiful.



*March 26.*

*Dear Mother dear:* Nothing new on our heights, which we go on getting in order—interesting work, though presenting many difficulties. We are aided in our labor by fine weather. From time to time the pickaxe strikes some poor dead body which war thus torments, even in his humble grave.

*March 28. On the heights. A cloudy Sunday disturbed by yesterday's bombardment.*

Here we are again in the midst of a battle. A formidable attack from our side repeats the carnage of last week; but my company, which was so cut to pieces at the last assault, fared more easily this time, as we were holding a defensive sector. So we were only bespattered by the combat and I could follow at a distance, on a most beautiful spring Saturday, the spectacle of the struggle. I saw the rampant beast, which an advancing battalion resembles, twisting through the smoke produced by the shells. The attacking party was composed of *chasseurs à pied*, light infantry, who advanced in spite of the machine guns and the bombarding which was kept up by the French and Germans alike. However, the brave fellows accomplished their

object and so retrieved the check of last week when our attack failed. Yesterday I lived the lithographs of Raffet,<sup>1</sup> but with this difference, that in his time it was less dangerous to follow a fight from the distance I was, for the rifles didn't then carry so far. It was a fine sight — the broad plain, at the foot of the cliffs which we occupy, scintillating with the flashes of a hundred thousand bursting shells, while the *chasseurs* kept on climbing up towards the enemy.

*Sunday, March 28. Second letter.*

*Dear Mama:* The morning has brought us bright weather. I have been moving about over our sector for some distance and I find that the bombardment is beginning again little by little. But in spite of it all I keep my soul turned towards hope, and whatever happens, I trust you and I may be blessed with wisdom. Dearest, I feel at moments how easy it would be for me to turn again to the occupations which were once the charm and interest of my life. At times during this fine weather I find myself eager to paint and keenly regretting that I am

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<sup>1</sup> Auguste Raffet (1804-60), French artist who made a specialty of the soldiers of the Revolution and the Empire.

not doing so again. But then I force myself to maintain and direct the resources of my soul and will in the narrow and difficult path required by my present course of life.

*April 1.*

Today a sun revealing the youth of spring. The Meuse, a river flowing gracefully by a rich village where the echoes of the cannonade arrive only as a dull sound and so lose their meaning. Such are my present surroundings, and it signifies that we have changed our cantonment. Such large reinforcements arrived that we gave place to others and our regiment has again changed its quarters. So everything is bright and fresh today. A tender, silver light envelops the distant stretches of the grand, grassy plain which the Hauts-de-Meuse border. I close this letter sitting on the river bank, which calls up keenly the joy I would have if I only could paint. I have before me the prettiest glimpses of spring.

*April 3.*

Only a word. Still in the spring woods. Sun and rain playing in the sky. Courage in spite of all.

*April 3. Second communication.*

I wish I had written better during these last days when everything was sweet to me, even while I was in the front line. But I admit I simply let myself enjoy living in these moments serene in spite of the howlings of war. We don't know what is happening next. There is much coming and going. Are we once more to support the shock of battle?

During our last stay in the first line we had to pass whole days in the casements, which these miserable bombardments force us to dig in the side of the hill for a distance of some ten or twelve yards. There, in complete darkness, we wait for night to come in order to go out. And will you believe it? There the soldiers, non-commissioned officers and I played, with our whole nature stirred, the nine symphonies of Beethoven. I can't describe the sensations which this music sent through us in that dugout. It was like fireworks. We quite forgot our cramped up position, which was like a Chinese torture, as we were neither seated, nor standing, nor lying down.

The life of a sergeant in cantonment is very agreeable, though I don't take advantage of it. But when I think of the front, I ask Provi-

dence to give me the strength of soul necessary to do my duty there to the very end. A good friend of mine, who was the head of our section, has just been made adjutant of our company.

All this, I fear, is of trifling interest to thee. But, dearest, I have not been up to much these last few days. In fact, I have not felt very well since the events of last month. So I have been simply trying to have a good time. I hope I have not been going too far and that Providence will guard me from danger.

*April 4.*

*Dear dearest Mama:* We are now all on the tiptoe of expectation and we feel that a menace is hanging over us. But in the meanwhile all is calm and idleness. Dearest, forgive me if for the last month I have not been up to much. Love me and ask our friends to love me. Did you get my photograph? It was taken at the happy epoch of the war for positions, when the days passed by peacefully and our only enemy was the rigor of the temperature. A little later I became corporal and then began for me a harder existence filled with

thankless toil. Next came the storm whose lightning flashes have brightened my life.

*April 4. Evening of Easter Sunday.*

*Dear Mother:* Here we are again in the care of God. In two hours we leave for the tempest. Dearest, I think of thee, I think of you both. I love you both, and I place all three of us under the protection of Providence. May we be ready for whatever happens. With the full strength of my soul this is the prayer I utter for us all. In spite of everything, let us hope, but above all, let us hold fast to wisdom and love. I embrace you both, but say no more. All my thoughts now turn towards a heavy duty.

*One a. m., April 5.*

*Dear Mother and dear Grandmother:* We are starting. Courage, love, and wisdom. Perhaps all this is done for our best good. All I can do is to send you both all my love. My life subsists only in you both.

*April 5. About noon.*

*Dear Mother:* Here we are on trial. So far I see no signs of being forsaken by the graces — those which come from God. It is ever our



duty to try and be worthy of them. This afternoon we shall need all our will power and we must have recourse to supreme wisdom. Dear Mother dear and dear Grandmother, may I still have the joy of your letters. Let us pray for support in the midst of all this. Dear dearest, ever all my love for you both.

*April 6. Noon.*

*Dear well-beloved Mother:* Here we are at noon at the extreme point of the attack. I send thee my whole love. Whatever happens, life has had beauty for me.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> It was in the combat of this day that the author of these letters disappeared and has never been heard from since.





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